THE UNBIDDEN GUEST

SILVIO VILLA

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THE UNBIDDEN GUEST

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THE UNBIDDEN GUEST

BY

SILVIO VILLA

With Four Illustrations by
CARLO BEUF

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4786

TO MY BROTHER

ALFONSO P. VILLA

WHOSE TWENTY-FIVE YEARS
OF INTELLIGENT WORK
IN AMERICA
EXEMPLIFIES THE VIRTUES
OF MODERN PROGRESSIVE ITALY

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INTRODUCING CARLETTO

On a warm evening in June I see my friend Carletto sitting all alone on a stone balustrade that surrounds a terrace in front of his house. Without saying a word I come and sit by him. I tickle the tip of my feet with a switch, and watch the sparrows playing in the gravel. Before us spreads a splendid view, the lovely river and the grand western sky above Nyack, glowing red. The breeze carries a scent of grass, just cut.

Carletto says: "How sweet is the scent of the hay!"

And I say: "How sweet!"

After a while he says: "It must be mowing time over there!"

And I say: "It must!"

Over there means our plain at home. In June, when they mow the hayfields, all is fragrance over that plain, all is song, all is harmony, the land at dusk is shrouded in a gauze of gold.

Carletto loves that land. He carries the memory of it within him everywhere. It is the land of Piedmont, sweet and fertile, where both he and I were born. We grew up together there, now we are busi-

ness men here in New York. In spare time he is a poet, too, and entertains me with the tales of his dreams. I have known his dreams for years. In listening to them, often I have desired to write them down and finally I conceived the plan of publishing them under my own name, for my entertainment.

He is not willing to do it himself, as he is shy, and, then, he claims he doesn't know how. Probably I know no better than he, but I am willing to try, as there is a pathos in those dreams that will reach the heart of the reader, no matter how plain the form in which they are set.

I am going to let Carletto tell his own tales. He will not need any introduction, as his character will appear from his own confessions. Though I may explain some of the circumstances under which he and I were brought up, so that the knowledge of them will help the reader to understand all sides of his being.

Over there we do not lead as active a life as they do here; at least, we did not, at the time Carletto and I were students. We drifted, rather than tried to forge ahead. Efficiency was a word unknown to us. We enjoyed being alive, in a general way, as most people do who are care-free. Carletto was care-free and happy-go-lucky in the extreme—as loose as a disabled balloon in a breezy sky. The field of his imagination was unlimited and he never made any attempt to have his will interfere with his fancy.

Fifteen years of American life have changed him, have made a level-headed business man of the happy-

go-lucky boy. Still, now and then he forgets himself, the business man mask drops off and the carefree boy of old appears. Not quite as care-free, though, as in days past! A tinge of melancholy now veils his smile. Out of our memories of those old days he draws emotions that are sweet, but sad. From the tales gathered in this book the reader will know what his loves were, his dreams and his emotions; what visions filled his boyhood days and his early youth.

At twenty-four—while his life was at its apex of joy—he was taken from his native land and plunged into the cold American business world. What happened then may be compared to what takes place when a red-hot piece of steel is dipped into chilly water. The loose elements solidify into a mass of hard crystals, part of them turn into microscopic diamonds. Under the outer business-like crust, the seething mass of his feelings has become crystallized pêle-mêle—poems, loves, dreams, visions of glory!

So here in the solitude of this terrace, he loves to contemplate his inner self. In the glow of sunset the crystals give forth strange glitters—like diamonds, like pure white diamonds, shine the immortal figures of the heroes, the visions of his fanciful youth! But the memories of those whom he has loved and lost throw, in the shadows of the falling evening, such reflections as no stone or crystal ever could cast!

He himself will acquaint you with the people and the landscapes of his childhood, with his gods and

heroes, with his loves, with some sides of Italian life perhaps heretofore unknown to you. Not all of him you will like. He has some virtues of the Latin and all the faults. He is capable of the finest emotions that ever moved human heart, but he does not always direct them as an Anglo-Saxon would like to see him do. This obscure side of his psychology I will not try to justify. One may perhaps be indulgent towards him, considering that he has a peculiar tendency to run away from the things he loves.

Italy is his greatest passion—still he has forsaken Italy now for fifteen years. He goes there, from time to time, to glean beautiful things, to stir up emotions, to buy fine books, then he comes back here to nurse his nostalgia. He reminds me of those who love country life, but who only spend two or three weeks a year in the country—the rest of the time they enjoy regretting it in the drawing-rooms of town.

His love for Italy is the key note of his character. In appearance he may pass for an American, and so he could, too, by the general tenor of his life. He has absorbed the spirit of this country, and, in his relations with other men, he sincerely recognizes and acts according to the principles that constitute the structure of social life here, but, as an individual, he is Latin through and through. His conception of Italy is something almost supernatural; it partakes of earth and heaven, and he seems to be bound to men and gods of that land, by joys and sorrows, from times immemorable. In one little chapter of this book you will see what emotions he draws out of the ancient

myths of our country, out of our legends, out of our marvelous history. There is no epoch, no century of Italy that has not left its stamp upon his soul.

He has been often criticized for his stubborn love for his old land, while his life is spent here. I myself sometimes have doubted whether he has the right to accept the great benefits that this country is bestowing upon him, without allying himself unconditionally with it. Then again, I have decided that, if we leave him as he is, it may be better for all concerned. I think that, after all, he contributes his share to the life of this country as well as others. For he conveys humbly to his friends here the spirit that the centuries of Italy have awakened in him.

The elements that go into advancing the civil and intellectual life of a great nation are infinite in number and in character. Let us accept, in its genuine essence, the one he brings to us! Maybe he is accomplishing a rôle for which few are as well fitted as he.

Solon, the lawmaker of Athens, sat, one day, in his house, surrounded by his friends celebrating the anthesterial days of the year. Every guest had brought some gift or contributed to the celebration a song or dance. The servant of the house appeared in the presence of Solon and said: "There is a woman at the door, from the Island of Lesbos. She brings no gift, nor does she know any new song or dance!" And Solon said: "Let the unbidden guest come in and partake of our bounty! She brings no gift, but perhaps the calm blue sea of Hellas is reflected in her eyes, or

in the folds of her robe she may carry to us the fragrant scent of her blossoming island."

Carletto, in America, is like the woman of Lesbos in the house of Solon!

Having gathered these various episodes, in order to make a coherent tale, Carletto has consented to let me convey them as if the book had been written by him, and in this form they will appear from the next chapter on.

THE TALES OF CARLETTO

I

BIANCA MARIA

My friends often ask me what I do when I disappear from town and seclude myself for a few days all alone in the country, and, when I answer that I go there to dream and to think, they smile. Perhaps they imagine me sitting by the fire, somewhere, lost in reverie, or else holding my head in my hands burdened by the weight of my thoughts. As a matter of fact I sometimes play a little golf and often take a brisk cross-country walk. During these wanderings my imagination works, my dreams develop along the way. Invisible creatures join me at a turn of the road, at the entrance of a trail, along a brook or in the shadow of the woods.

I am as sensitive as a girl of sixteen. Any little event is enough to set my blood aflutter, to let my reveries loose. The other day, walking through the Sleepy Hollow country over to Briarcliff, I came across a team going down the road. The horse had a bell around his neck, and the sound of that bell reminded me, suddenly, of a horse that we used to

own at home in Italy. The horse's name was Lins. We pastured him in a meadow, just back of our house in Castelbetto.

It was great sport for us, when children, to hide in the bushes where Lins was grazing, and with sudden cries and noises to scare him off into a gallop, then to jump out and chase him shouting wildly, "Lins's run away, Lins's run away!" The horse was so old and so accustomed to the game that he just cantered around in a circle once or twice, and then slowed down to a walk. Thereupon one of us caught him valiantly by the mane and grabbed the rope. I was too small to take an active part in the chase, but I trotted about like the rest, shouting and yelling. The one who accomplished the deed of stopping Lins was the hero of the day. My mother and Bianca Maria bending over their needlework, often lifted their eyes and watched the performance from a window of the ground floor. From time to time they called, "Boys! Boys!" in an admonishing tone. They didn't seem to attach much importance to the fact that we were trying to stop the runaway. That rather disappointed us. What was the use of being heroes if nobody took notice?

Once or twice during the summer we hitched Lins to the old family carriage and went to pay calls on our little friends in the neighborhood. One of my brothers drove the horse. I, too small to be of much use for anything, was given a willow switch, and kept busy from the box chasing the flies from the back of Lins. Bianca Maria, sitting inside the carriage, kept

an eye on me all the time and grabbed me by the coat whenever I leaned too far forward in an effort to reach the ears of Lins with the tip of my whip.

We generally covered the same circuit, following first the straight road across the plain from Castelbetto to Valsanta, then from Valsanta to S. Ciro, along the edge of the tableland. The rolling country, gay with vineyards, stretches as far as the eye can reach towards Asti, then from S. Ciro back through the plain to Castelbetto. The country was bare of trees, and the sun scorching.

Lins plodded along at an even gait, unmindful of the whip, unmindful of the flies, of the sun, of the tickling of my switch. The farmers around the country recognized him from afar, and came to the edge of their melon patches to present us with a melon, or from the vineyards to hand us a bunch of grapes or a basket of peaches. These rural gifts piled up on the box at my side and under my feet. I often came back sitting on a pumpkin or with a garland of garlic around my neck. Bianca Maria knew all those peasants. She praised them for their skill in plowing straight furrows, for their diligence in keeping the patches free from weeds. They talked respectfully to her; in former times her family had been one of the most prominent in that part of the country, but through bad investments and dissipation they had lost their fortune and when Bianca Maria was left an orphan she had to look for a position to make a living. She came to us when I was a tiny tot and

she took care of us in those early days of our life with the devotion of an elder sister.

Never do I recall her vision that I don't feel a tender passion for her. I can see her keeping a vigilant eye on us during those drives through the sunny country, then watching us through our playful antics with our friends.

The first call we generally made was on some little cousins of ours in Valsanta. Their father, once Prime Minister, was now a member of Parliament for that section and a well known political man throughout Italy. His wife was greatly conscious of her husband's position, as well as of the fact that her father had been one of the most popular patriots of the *Risorgimento*. She put on airs, utterly out of tune with the simple character of the place, and was rather a source of amusement to her friends. We children felt uneasy in her presence. Her house was much more pretentious than any in the neighborhood, her parlor being a sort of museum where she had gathered souvenirs of her father and the trophies of her husband. On her large old sofa she sat enthroned, dispensing judgments, keeping an eye on us, afraid that we might be up to mischief, or damage the treasures collected under her roof.

I must admit that I enjoyed much more the houses of our other friends. There in the cool, simple playrooms on the ground floor, we felt more at home running out in the garden if we wished, free to look at the pictures in the books or to play about the house. At times a chicken would stray in from the open door,

or a rabbit, giving us the treat of a chase. At times, the braying of a donkey out in the yard interrupted our games. We had great times, sucked the icy orangeades or punch with a straw, and ate cookies.

We started home at sunset, driving straight west. Under the red sky, the mountains stretched like a huge wall around the landscape, and the plain, at that hour, had the soft color that the fields assume in the afterglow—all was peace and suavity. A light breeze blew over the meadows. Now and then from a distant village came the sound of the Ave Maria. Bianca bent her head, murmuring a prayer at the mystic salute of the evening bell. At a turn of the road Castelbetto appeared with its red roofs, and its two church steeples, black against the flaming sky.

Never does the vision of Castelbetto in that sunset glow appear to me but it awakens in my heart the tender memory of Bianca Maria, with a feeling of deepest piety. My heart laments for this girl, who gave up her life for us, who carried a great burden for us and died under the strain.

Twenty years have passed. We have grown and have dispersed, each one pursuing his aim in life. She has remained there in that obscure village, asleep in the little square of the *camposanto*. An edge of boxwood and a line of poplars run around the enclosure. On the plot grow the daisies and the forget-me-nots, birds sing in the spring, and the Italian sky shines gloriously above. But in the winter the bleak days pass, one by one, the wind blows, the rain soaks the

ground, and she lies there. We are all far away, absorbed in the tasks into which the adventures of life have driven us.

Oh Bianca Maria, Bianca Maria! For days, for months, and for years we leave you deserted. We enjoy the sunlight to which your eyes are closed, we are urged by desires and ambitions that were unknown to us when you led our first steps, but whatever is good in us and whatever good we do is the fruit of the seed that you planted then.

Here in this country, when a charming view recalls our land at home, I often see your soft and delicate profile outlined against the sky. You are walking beside me, with your pensive smile, with the veiled beauty that shone in your deep brown eyes. You have not changed, Bianca, but I have grown, I have grown much older than you. I feel now like passing my hand over your soft hair as you did then on mine, and kissing you, calling you sweet names as you did then to me.

You were all white, I remember, when you lay dead with your arms folded on your chest, all white, but for the crown of brown hair about your face. I looked at you, standing on tiptoe. Your virgin face bore some marks of fatigue, slight blue shadows were under your eyes, a narrow thin line ran across your forehead. You appeared so young, still so grave!

I had then a confused revelation of the sacrifice you had made for us. Now the vision comes back to me. What I hazily perceived then I know now. I

know that you spent sleepless and anxious nights for us; to prevent us from worrying, you wept in secret, smiling when we were present, and you took upon yourself the cares, the anxieties of us all. Under the burden you fell, but we got the benefit of your love's labor. You knew but little joy or little ease. Outside of the narrow circle of our family you had no recognition. You sleep lonely in the obscure village where we were born. I am the master of my own life. In this land of struggle I have my place among the winners—I partake of their privileges, I enjoy music, art, and the company of people. All is life—all is joy about me!

Almost every day at the sunset hour Bianca Maria used to take us out for a walk to a little chapel, just outside the village. This chapel was built at the far end of a huge embankment, a remnant of the old fortifications, stretching out into the fields for a quarter of a mile. Two lines of horsechestnut trees, one on each side, made a shady walk in the center. Its slight elevation above the level of the fields gave us a good view of the plain and of the mountains in the far distance.

The door of the chapel was often open. In the semidarkness of the nave one could see on the altar the white statue of the Madonna, lighted by a few candles. A cluster of little lights also burned in one corner, humble homage of the village people. Returning from the fields in the evening, they stopped for a prayer. They walked in, their bare feet making no noise on the white cement floor, dropped a

soldo in the slot, and drew a tiny wax taper which they lit at the oil lamp. Then they placed it in the holder with all signs of devotion, as though they were handling something sacred and precious. They ascended the steps, and, leaning over, they kissed the statue. Then they crossed themselves and saluted with a deep bow. The little quivering lights shone on one side by the image of the Madonna. There was a simplicity about it all that was rather touching. It had the mystic note that gives a deep meaning to sincere expressions of faith.

The walls of the chapel were decorated with pictures representing the miracles performed by the Madonna on the people of the town. Those pictures were painted by local artists, often by the peasants themselves. They represented falls from windows, houses on fire, runaway teams, children under the wheels of a cart, all saved by the miraculous intervention of the Madonna. She stood in the corner of the picture, holding the Bambino in her arms. On her head was a crown radiating beams of light.

Other pictures represented people recovering by divine intercession after having been sick beyond hope. The patient was generally seen stretched on his bed, pale and in great distress. The whole family knelt around the bed praying for him, and the doctor of the village in one corner was shown throwing up his arms in discouragement. It must have been rather disconcerting for him. When he had succeeded, after a most conscientious cure, in getting a patient back on his feet, the chances were that a picture of the case

(as above described) would be put on the walls of the chapel, with thanks to the Madonna. For us children those pictures were an inexhaustible source of admiration and astonishment.

The chapel was also decorated with silver hearts, wax limbs, crutches, and symbols of all sorts, attestations of the blind faith of those simple souls in the Virgin. In the semi-obscurity of the nave we continually discovered new objects for our curiosity.

Outside the church, the glorious light of the sunset blazed above the mountains like a huge conflagration. Coming out of the chapel we had to raise our hands to our eyes, blinded by the glare. All the sky, from the southern end of the Alps up to the extreme northwest, was red like a flame. We knew every point, every crest of those mountains. Running our eyes along the enormous ridge we could name every one, from the Monviso, black against the crimson light, to the Mont Rose, wrapped in its soft haze of pink.

Bianca Maria always knelt at the steps of the chapel, for a last prayer, while we played about in noisy games. Great yelling we did and often the game turned into a general scuffle. When the tumult grew too high and disturbing, without stopping her prayer Bianca would turn her head slowly and admonish us with a glance of her eyes. There was in those eyes an expression of mild reproach, beseeching peace, a soft appeal that abated our excitement.

Through the open door the lights on the altar seemed to gleam more brightly and as the sun declined the color of the sky assumed a clear tinge of

rose, growing paler and paler. On the fields the mist of the evening blended the shadows into an indescribable hue of brown. Suddenly a clear note from the belfry above rang out the Ave Maria. About Bianca we gathered kneeling by her side for a last prayer.

Then Bianca Maria took us down to a little well back of the chapel to drink the water supposed to be miraculous. The well was at the foot of the embankment, protected by a rustic roof which also covered a little shrine of the Madonna. By leaning over the edge, with the aid of a ladle fixed to the wall by a chain, we could just reach the water.

The peasants were by this time coming back from the fields and stopped to cross themselves at the shrine and drink at the well. We volunteered our services, handing them the water, or holding their scythes while they drank. Bianca Maria questioned them about the crops. How was the millet? Was the corn turning yellow? Had the drought done any damage? Were the weeds bad that year? She seemed to know a lot about the work of the fields. Also she inquired about the families at home, the children, the ones who had been sick. Often she started towards the village, walking slowly with the women, giving them advice how to run the house, how to keep the men away from the *osteria*. That young girl, delicate and slender, had in her simple and unassuming way an authority that those people felt as much as we felt the admonishing virtue of her eyes.

At the entrance of the village she usually stopped to have a talk with the wife of our gardener, who waited for us on the step of her house. This woman did the marketing for us. Early in the morning she watched for the farmers coming down to the village, and stopping them on the road selected from their baskets the best they brought in—fresh vegetables, eggs, chickens, and fruits. For a while, Bianca and she discussed the purchases for the next day. We put in our petitions for a rabbit, a goose, or nuts, or something else. She tried to please us all, and indeed it was no easy task!

By the time we got home the sun had set, and the calm gray mist of the evening had gathered over the plain. In the sky, above the court and the garden, the swallows still flew back and forth in a last round of playful flights. Our dog Pilin was all excitement, running about and barking at the birds. He had been waiting for us, back of the door, sniffing and getting restless as he heard the approaching sound of our steps. In the court my brothers set him after the swallows, chasing him around the place and playing all sorts of tricks with him.

I roamed the kitchen on the ground floor, trying to steal a slice of melon or a biscuit. Passing by Elisa, the old kitchen maid, I thrust my hands into a pot of boiled potatoes which she was peeling and grabbed one, just in time to escape a whack of her knife on my fingers.

Our dinner was a lively reunion. Great arguments arose among us children on all subjects. The

conversation was made particularly picturesque by the gesticulations that illustrated the talk. Still it never reached too high a pitch, as Bianca Maria tuned it down, now and then, with a "Heh, heh!" She entertained us with the accounts of the happenings in the village, of the daily news, at times with a fairy story. By the time dinner was over we were all more or less sleepy, having been out in the air all day. We tried to interest ourselves in a game of checkers or cards, but by and by our heads grew heavy and our talk gradually ceased.

Then Bianca Maria gathered us together to say our prayers. In a little room next to the dining room we knelt on the sofa leaning our heads against the wall and muttered mechanically paternosters and Salve Reginas. After the prayer Bianca Maria took us up to bed. She helped us undress and tucked us well under the sheets. Then she waited in the room, sitting by the open window until we fell asleep. From the plain came the scent of the hay and the soft sounds of the country at night—katydids' calls, cries of night birds, barking of dogs in the distance, and now and then the song of a party stripping corn in the courtyard of a farm.

These sounds grew softer and softer, finally melting into our dreams. Bianca Maria would give a last look to see that we were well covered and sleeping peacefully. Then she went downstairs. She came back once more for a last look before going to bed. Sometimes opening our eyes we could see her holding

. . . THEN SHE WAITED IN THE ROOM, SITTING BY THE OPEN WINDOW. . . .

a lamp above us. The next morning at dawn she was there again!

Little by little Bianca Maria grew pale and thin. She died before we realized all that she was doing for us. Humble as she was, she stands in my memory with the great tender figures of poetry and drama—the equal of Antigone and Cordelia!

II

THE DOCTOR OF CASTELBETTO

I HAVE incidentally mentioned the doctor of Castelbetto. He carried on his profession more for love than for money, having a comfortable income from a large farm which he owned in the vicinity of the village.

He spent the winter in Turin and moved out to the country early in the spring, when active life begins in the fields. While in Castelbetto he practiced medicine as an extra occupation. He did it on the humanitarian principle of contributing his share of knowledge to relieve the miseries of the people among whom he was born and whom he loved. Everybody knew him within twenty miles of Castelbetto, everybody knew his horse Cianin. At the time I am talking of, he had to a great extent reduced his practice. Still, during the summer the people from the village and the country around came to consult him, for they had great confidence in his advice.

He had an office on the ground floor of his house and the patients waited for their turn out in the garden, where a few rustic benches were set for their accommodation. At times, on our way home Bianca

Maria stopped to have a chat with those simple people and to hear from them their tales of woe. They talked about their diseases, using the most unscientific expressions to describe them. Fire in the throat, worms in the stomach, poison in the liver, bugs in the brains, were among the most common troubles that afflicted the crowd. I must admit that listening to those talks I got the queerest notions of anatomy, trying to represent to myself what took place in the human body when anything went wrong.

They also spoke of their homes and their lives and the hopes they put in the small piece of land that they owned. All of them were relying on the products of the soil for their living. All of them, for generations, had been tilling the plain, attending the cattle, growing silkworms. Their notion of the world was limited to the plain of Piedmont, compassed within the great circle of the Alps. A stubborn love of the natal village held them to their homes. With tenacious patience they labored in their fields, getting from every inch of the soil every spear of grain it could yield.

That plain is the best producing section for wheat and corn of all Italy. The property is mostly distributed among small farmers or modest estates, and everybody who wants to work has a chance to make a living. The people are frugal and of limited ambition. They are not adventurous or restless like their brothers of the sea-towns. The love of home is stronger in them than any dreams of riches that they could undertake to realize by migrating to for-

eign lands. Very seldom you meet a Piedmontese in America; if any, they come from the large towns.

They are intelligent and honest. It has often occurred to me that they may do an injustice to themselves by so restraining their aspirations. They live there their rude life, the sons taking up the task of the father and carrying it on the same primitive principles without improvement. Still, they have the soundest qualities of mind and heart. By listening to them in those early days, I picked up a lot of ideas that I would not have learned so well in books or by later experience. I got in touch then with their simple souls and took a part in their sorrows and their joys. If they were hazy in their knowledge of anatomy, they knew well the distinction between right and wrong, and had a sound understanding of the sane principles of life.

The sanctity of family ties, respect for the old and the unfortunate, the wholesomeness of work, love of nature, and purity of thought were conceptions that made a deep impression upon my mind, coming from the people that knew little but what they had naturally absorbed from their constant touch with mother earth and with one another. It was a great broad-minded policy of Bianca Maria to bring us in touch with these simple people. She knew that children are more apt to build their character on the ideas that they get naturally from things and people about them than from tedious teachings. She knew her peasants and their life well enough to realize that their principles were good enough for us to absorb.

Some of the doctor's clients would occasionally appear before him bringing a sick cow or a pig and would ask him whether he would mind looking at the animal. He was always good enough to go out into the garden and examine the cow or the pig. At times we would assist him in the task, holding the pig by the tail. It squealed and pulled, creating a great commotion, to our huge delight.

There were only three days in the week that he had consultations, as he did not wish to be disturbed every day. Still, if anybody came on the odd days, he was not refused. Sometimes people would send a call for his services from some distant farm or village. He would hitch Cianin and go, protesting that they had no business to send for him, that he was getting old and they should go to the young doctor. At the bottom of his heart, though, he was flattered by the loyalty of these old farmers wanting nobody but him, when any one in the house was sick.

Cianin knew the road to every farm, to every hamlet in the plain. A few sounds of the tongue and an occasional caress of the whip would lead him better than the play of the reins. The doctor gave him his head, dropping the reins, absorbed in his own thoughts, absorbed in the sight of the plain, always different whether under the blazing skies of midday or the glow of the sunsets.

He had the soul of a poet and the large views that a pensive man acquires from long contact with simple people and with nature. In his youth he had taken part in the first attempt for the liberation of

Italy, the war of 1848. Those short days of glory had left an indelible impression on his mind. Then he had come back, after the disaster of Novara, and spent the ten years that followed in Castelbetto. Sad years for Italy! He had known Cavour—known him as a man, visited him in his place at Santena, a few miles from Castelbetto. It was the pride of his life to have had the benevolent friendship of that great man. He took us once to Santena to visit his tomb. He knew the guardians and the old superintendent of the castle. Hat in hand, they talked with him by the mausoleum, while we on tiptoe looked at the sculptures and wreaths of flowers across the railing. They went over the recollections of those faithful years when the reaction was raging all over the peninsula, and he, the Master Mind, from little Piedmont, was devising and carrying on the plans that were to set Italy free.

I didn't understand all of the conversation then; still the great figure of Cavour, in those surroundings where the man had lived, outlined itself most impressively on my childish imagination.

The doctor of Castelbetto had a real gift for narrating historical facts and portraying the character of men. Rather than go into detailed descriptions, he made the men appear as human beings and act as humans do. Thus he touched both our imagination and our hearts, and conveyed to us the vivid throb of events. No tragic poem ever stirred me as the tale from his mouth of the revolutions of '48, the

short weeks of victorious war, the ride of Carlo Alberto under the walls of Peschiera and the great cry of his Piedmontese, hailing him king of Italy! What a dream! Within a month, beaten at Custozza, he was thrown back into his little kingdom of Piedmont. For eight months he had to stand the abuse of the demagogues, the ire of the deluded patriots, until, driven to desperate straits, he led his army once more to meet the Austrians, and on the field of Novara he lost the war and his crown.

Never shall I forget the figure of that sad king as the doctor of Castelbetto described him to me! The evening after the battle he saw him riding in the streets of Novara, pale and dejected, followed by a few of his staff. They stopped at the gate of a modest house, where the king dismounted. There that night he gave up the crown of Piedmont, passing it to his son Vittorio Emanuele, then he departed into exile to die heart-broken!

In a convent on the Portuguese coast of the Atlantic he died within four months—alone and disconsolate. No cheerful news came to comfort his last days. Now and then a message reached him: The troops of Hapsburg, carrying with them the imperial hate of their master, were, torch in hand, again over-

running the plains of Lombardy, thirsty for revenge. On the scaffold were dying the best youth of the country. Towns were sacked and burned. In the night the skies of Lombardy were red with reflections of flames. Brescia, that had closed the gates to the Austrians, burned in the plain day and night for a week, like an immense torch!

III

THE POEM OF GARIBALDI

THUS I learned the story of our *Risorgimento,* by great pictures, by passionate tales.

One of the great characters in the village was an old Garibaldino, a man who claimed he had followed Garibaldi in all his battles and often had shaken hands with the General and even dined at the table with him. You can imagine the tremendous prestige that this man had with us children! On the "Festa dello Statuto," falling in the first week of June, he dressed up with his glorious red shirt and paraded the streets of Castelbetto, carrying the Italian flag at the head of a squad of other fellows who also claimed to be veterans of Garibaldi. This patriotic parade stirred up great enthusiasm in the village—every house had a flag, except the parish house. Naturally there was no good blood between the village priest and our friend the Garibaldino, the antagonism between the State and the Church being still alive in those days, and manifesting itself by a bitter animosity between the parish priest and the representative of the class that had fought and overthrown the Pope.

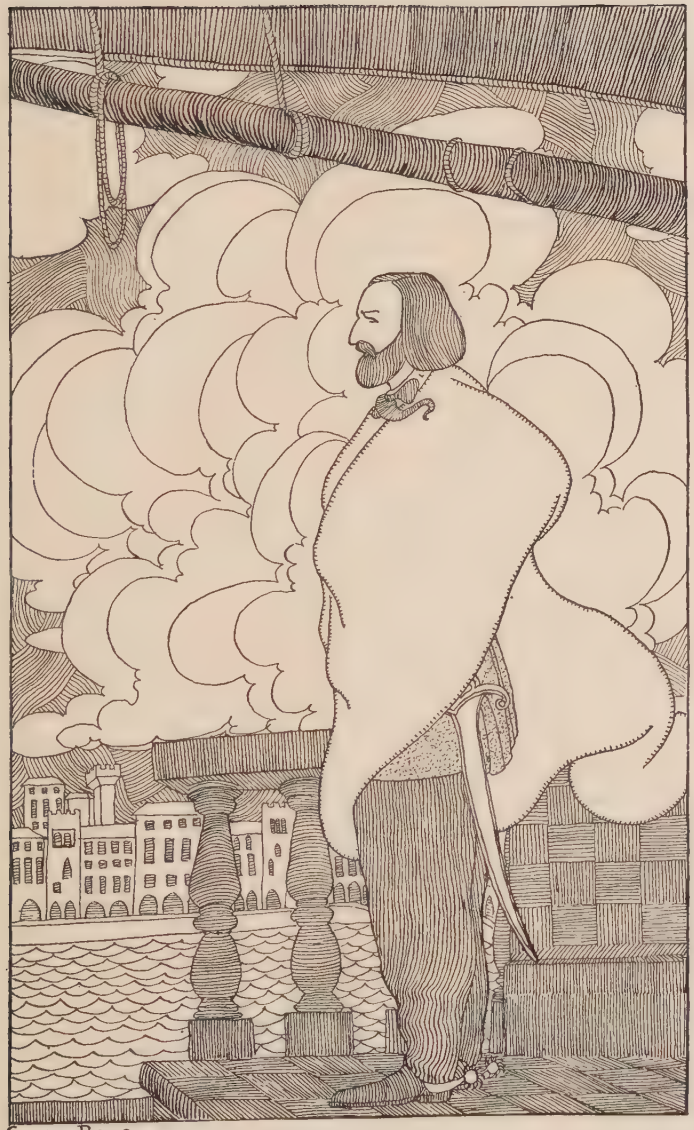
Our Garibaldino had been a carpenter in former days, and still owned a shop where he spent most of

his time sitting on a bench and entertaining people with his tales, while his son and his helpers attended to their tasks. When I was about twelve or fourteen I had a taste for manual work, sawing planks, driving nails, making boxes and cabinets. I made the shop of the carpenter my playground. The old man, sitting on a bench, smoking his pipe and dangling his legs, followed my attempts, giving me advice and help in matters where he himself had been an expert.

Other people drifted in, as is the custom in the villages, to sit down and have a talk, while smoking their pipes. The shop opened out on the road. Through the door one could see the plain and the fields. The landscape gave the old man an inexhaustible supply of means with which to illustrate his tales. With a gesture of his hand he created on it imaginary hills, dug rivers, rushed bayonet charges through the fields.

The plain was golden with ripe crops, under the vibrating light of summer. The tales of the old man sounded like a vivid reality in that setting. He was certain effective and picturesque. I suppose more picturesque than faithful to the truth. His abundant enthusiasm often carried him way beyond the limits that a dispassionate historian should impose upon himself. He didn't seem to be posted about the limitations of human beings.

When it came to talk of Garibaldi, he attributed to him qualities that pertain only to demigods. I don't remember whether he ever stated that Garibaldi could fly, but he certainly described him, during the



GARIBALDI HAD COME, THE BLOND SAILOR. . . .

attack of Villa Corsini, spurring his horse up and down a staircase one hundred feet high, as steep as a wall. Still, as far as I know, neither Garibaldi nor his horse had wings! Gross exaggerations like this were met by the audience with some incredulity, and at times one of them would give signs of his skepticism by a giggle. This made the old man furious, and he sailed into the incredulous listener with terrific vehemence. The new generation had no ideals! Bunch of mollycoddles! He wished he had a chance to line them all under the fire of the enemy and see then how they would giggle.

One fellow especially roused his ire. He was a man by name Nicolino, a loafer by profession, who had in time past owned a small property which he was obliged to sell to pay his debts. Nicolino would sit in one corner of the shop always silent, listening eagerly to the adventurous tales. When it came to one of the extraordinary heights, with a twinkle of his eyes, he would make a little sound, imitating the blowing of a horn—*Toot! toot!*—at which they would all burst into laughter. This made the old man wheel around to him, like a viper: "What do you mean with your *Toot, toot!*" Nicolino made no explanation whatever, but repeated the sound, *Toot, toot!* Whereupon the old man flew into a black rage and stopped talking for the rest of the day. This didn't happen often, though, and most of the time they listened with real emotion to our friend.

He told his story: Garibaldi had come, the blond sailor from across the ocean, at the first call of the

revolution. He had left the plains of the Pampas and appeared one morning of April in the sea of Genoa, sailing with his white sails toward the grand amphitheater of marble palaces. He had come, and kneeling before the king who once signed his sentence of death had asked him to let him fight under his flag for Italy! With his volunteers he had accomplished miracles of valor, waging a war of his own, independent of the army, harassing the enemy on all sides: hitting west, when he was expected to be east, winning every action he fought, elusive, invisible, invincible.

After the disaster of Novara, he had flown to the defense of Rome, taking under his flag the best youth of Italy; from the Alps, from the sea, from the plains, from the hills of the peninsula they came. They entered the city one morning in May, a picturesque group of cavaliers and soldiers, preceded by their leader on his white horse, a mantle floating from his shoulders like the white wing of Victory. They fought in the Gardens of Villa Pamphili, in the rosebushes, on the marble steps, under the golden light of the Roman dawn. They fell among the flowers and soaked with their blood the marble balustrades, clinging to the silent statues in a grip of death.

Most of them were slain: Mameli, the poet; Dandolo, descendant of the men who led the galleys of Venice to the conquest of the Orient; Morosini, scion of the Doges, seventeen years old. Calm, on his horse, the blond leader turned his blue eyes on the boys. His sure gaze threw into their hearts a throb

of glory. He led them to the supreme sacrifice! But the sacrifice was vain—against the overwhelming force of the enemy they had to yield. At night, on the Square of St. Peter, Garibaldi gathered the remnants of his army, and said to them: "I am leaving Rome. I am going to carry the war into the mountains. To him who follows me I offer hunger, thirst, forced marches, battles, and death. Who will come?"

They all followed him.

They left the city from Porta San Giovanni. Anita was with them, Garibaldi's wife. They ventured through the Campagna, then through the Umbrian hills, through the wooded sides of the Apennines. For the whole month of July they pressed forward, hunted, hungry, scorched by the sun, soaked by the summer showers. From the side of the mountain they could see the enemy's troops pursuing them—as thick in the plain as spears of wheat in the field.

They reached San Marino, the little republic on top of a mountain peak in the heart of the Apennines. There they were surrounded, and had to disperse. Garibaldi, with his wife and two hundred men, made his escape at night, and succeeded in reaching the little town of Cesenatico on the Adriatic coast. There they got hold of a few sailboats and set out on the sea as the day rose. The little fleet had red and orange sails. They sailed north, trying to reach Venice, then blockaded by the Austrians. They had a fife, and on it they played tunes and sang while sailing.

But they were discovered by the Austrian fleet. Some of the boats were sunk, some captured, some driven to shore. Garibaldi landed on a marshy land by the mouth of the Po, and had with him a lame man and his wife Anita, ill with fever. He was pursued by Austrian troops. The marshes were swarming with them. In the anxiety of the escape, Anita died in his arms—the girl who had been his companion, who had stood at his side during many battles. He and the lame man dug a grave in the sand and laid there the dead body of Anita. Then he kept on, a fugitive through the Ravenna forest, through the Apennines, through the Tuscan hills, till he reached the Tyrrhenian sea and set sail.

This story that sounds like a poem I heard over and over again from our friend the old carpenter, and many a time, after he got through with his tale, I sat dumb, spellbound, thinking of the man thus sailing away on the sea with despair in his heart, a fugitive from his land!

For about two years Garibaldi lived in America, right across the bay from New York in the village of St. George, Staten Island. He worked there as a journeyman in a small candle factory. Then, for four years, he traveled the seas east and west, to Brazil, to Peru, to China, to every port on the map—restless, like Odysseus—haunted by the vision of Italy in chains.

All of Italy, outside of Piedmont, was then in the

throes of reaction. Scaffolds were being raised in all the cities of the peninsula. No chance of liberty! But in one small corner, in our city of Turin, great networks of conspiracies were being woven for the redemption of our unhappy land.

Camillo Cavour was taking the helm of the State. Another man, Giuseppe Mazzini, pale, frail, idealistic, was organizing the struggle, preaching the gospel of liberation for the country by the united efforts of her sons.

This man, too, was a fugitive from the defense of Rome. He had, during the short days of the little republic, in 1849, held the government with Saffi and Montanelli. He was now living in hiding, abroad. At the end of three years of restless traveling, Garibaldi met him in London. He heard his inspired words. He learned from him the fate of their friends and disciples—Ugo Bassi shot by the Austrians, the nine of Belfiore hanged, patriots slain by the red walls of Milan Castle, those starved in the Neapolitan dungeons, dragged to the Moravian prisons, chained to the walls, dishonored by the Austrian whip!

An indomitable hate moved his leonine heart. He came back to Italy frantic for action. But the time was not ripe—Cavour had the destinies of Italy then in hand, his plans were crafty and slow, far-reaching, and must not be jeopardized by any hasty step. The hero retired to his rocky island of Caprera and nursed there, in the wild primeval surroundings, his great passion.

The war of 1859 came. The united forces of France and Piedmont proceeded to throw the Austrians out of Italy. Garibaldi again, with three thousand volunteers, waged his own war, always ahead of the main army. When the armistice of Villafranca was signed, he had reached way out into the Trentine mountains. He was recalled then. Lombardy had been set free, but Venetia had been left under the Austrian yoke. Full of bitter rage, once more he returned to Caprera and waited there for the fateful day when he would be wanted again.

And that day came! As the Rhapsodists singers of Greece told the poem of the Argonauts, let me tell the great rhapsody of our land, the sail of the Liberator over the violet sea to the island of olives and roses and marble temples. Not the golden fleece tempted him; he sailed to bring love and freedom to our brethren. He called his companions to a deserted spot on the rocky coast of Liguria.

In the red sunset of May he stood and watched them gather in silence. He wore his white mantle and carried the sword of Rome; his leonine mane flowed on his shoulders. Back of him spread the great gardens of Villa Spinola; at his feet was the deep sea, in the distance the marble vision of Genoa. He who had been a sailor in his youth knew how to handle the rudder as well as the sword, knew how to read the course of the stars in the sky. One thousand men they were who came to him from all sections of Italy, all of one heart. Under the full moon of May

the two boats that carried the destinies of Italy plowed the blue waters.

At the break of the fifth day, the wooded summit of the Erician Mountain emerged above the mist—the mountain of Aphrodite, the solitary summit crowned with pines. At its feet lay the Sicilian shore, golden under the rising sun. From the bow of the ship, Garibaldi cast his calm placid gaze over the island. On those shores Daphins, the shepherd, had once sung his melodious lay, holding his beloved in his arms, while the white sheep waded into the Sea of Sicily. The gift of the blue-eyed Persephone covered the sides of the hills, sweet crocuses and violets and white lilies. On this enchanted shore they landed, through fields of aloe and cactus, under the gorgeous sky in the springtime, almost forgetful of having come there to make war.

Of a sudden, at the break of the fifth day, in front of them appeared the slopes of Calatafimi, swarming with soldiers, crowned with guns. They threw themselves into the fight. All day under the scorching sun they struggled uphill. They fought from bush to bush, from shelter to shelter, leaving the dead behind. Garibaldi was everywhere. His spirit carried them forward. As the day drew to a close in a last rush, they reached the top, and they beat the soldiers of the King of Naples down the opposite side of the slope.

The next day they swept on towards Palermo. From the heights of Gibilrossa, within the great circle of the Conca d'Oro, beyond the groves of oranges,

they saw the city appear, first the spires of the cathedral, then the roof of the royal palace. They set their tents for the night—a fragrance of spring rose from the valley below.

The next evening they marched on again, sometimes crawling through narrow paths, in small groups they went, these thousand redeemers of Sicily. All night they continued to march, and at dawn they reached the outskirts of Palermo.

There they were met by the royal defenders and once again those men who had never been soldiers before won the battle. Nino Bixio was shot in the chest. He dug out the bullet with his fingers and continued the fight. They entered Palermo. For three days the Thousand fought their way to victory. The people fought along with them, men, women, children, with no arms at all. Twenty thousand soldiers, and the Viceroy of Sicily had to raise the white flag of surrender.

Across the rest of the island, during that month of June, Garibaldi led his army. He beat, once more, the royal troops at Milazzo. Then he crossed over to the mainland and marched on toward Naples. The miserable king had not the heart to wait for him—he fled, fled from his palace, at the fall of night, like a coward, and went to Gaeta to put himself under the protection of his army. But the King of Piedmont, Vittorio Emanuele, was marching against him from the north, and Garibaldi from the south. They met over the fields of the Volturno. The King of Naples was defeated and his rule ended forever.

On the night of the victory, Garibaldi and the King of Piedmont rode side by side on the battlefield. Then the hero donated the kingdom he had won to Vittorio Emanuele and sailed away to his little island of Caprera. No gift, no gold he carried with him, nothing except a bag of seeds. He lifted the anchor with his own hands, and spread the sail over the purple sea toward the setting sun.

This is the Poem of Garibaldi as I often heard it from my friend the old carpenter. I have related it as it was conveyed to me, just leaving out some exaggerations of his and adding some poesy of mine. It is true as to the historical facts, though wrapped in a haze of legend. For in telling the lives of our heroes, we shouldn't use the arid forms of scientific history. These destroy the heroic visions of beauty. I cherish this figure of Garibaldi as I perceived it when a child. Thus you nurse in your heart your first conception of George Washington.

One soft evening in May I stood on the lawn of Mount Vernon gazing at the river, overcome by the sacred spirit of the place. A young man appeared, and, as we exchanged a few words, he recognized me as a foreigner. Inquiring as to my impressions of America, he gave me his account of George Washington's life. He was not quite posted about the facts. Once or twice I could have stopped him and corrected his tale. Still he conveyed to me a portrait of the man, more consistent and sublime than any that I had ever conceived by my own study of history.

Pure ana noble, the Father of American liberty appeared to me, through his tale, a superhuman revelation of simplicity, valor, and wisdom.

I listened to my young friend, surprised and glad to find in him those qualities of enthusiasm which I thought were the privilege of us Latins. He was only a clerk in a store somewhere in the West—without culture or knowledge, but the spirit of America was in him. In the presence of the historic home, he found the inspiration for creating and revealing to me a most noble portrait of the Father of the Country.

IV

PERPLEXED

My friend the old Garibaldino and the parish priest did not get along at all well. Often, when they met, they were very unfriendly to each other. When the priest passed by the carpenter shop, our friend never failed to say, "There he goes, the black crow!" He also used to sail bitterly into the Church and the Popes present and past.

This didn't please me at all. I had been brought up by my mother in strict observance of the Catholic religion and to respect all forms and institutions connected with it. The Pope was the Vicar of Christ, whom we all must revere and love. Now, this man called him the vilest expressions he could find. He referred in particular to Pope Pius IX and to the Church at his period.

While I was accustomed to his exaggerations, the violence of his talk and the signs of deep earnestness in his expression could not fail to impress me. Once I asked him: "Why do you insult the dead Pope? Wasn't he the head of our church? Wasn't he the minister of Christ? Didn't he carry on his mission of peace and love?" He looked me in the eyes, and then he said slowly, as though he knew that his words

would bring a great shock to me, "He was a bad man." As I stood silent and aghast under the effect of the answer, he continued: "He was a bad man. He broke his pledge to Italy; he broke his pledge to God; he did not fulfill his mission of peace and love; he joined hands with Austria, and went begging the enemies of his country to support him against his country; he made common cause with the King of Naples for the oppression of the patriots; he kept his prisons full, and bereaved the children of their fathers, the old men of their sons. Come here, listen." He pulled me to him and softened his voice, as though he wanted me alone to hear. The others in the shop had stopped their talk and had drawn silently toward us. Nicolino in his corner sat still and dumb. The man said:

"In '68, one sad day in November, the Pope had two gallows set up in front of St. Peter's. The day was gray, the air was cold, the bells of the churches now and then broke the sad silence. I knew both the men who were going to die on those gallows. One was twenty years old, his name was Giuseppe Monti, and he was engaged to be married. The other was older, he had a wife and three children. His name was Tognetti. They loved Rome and wished her redeemed to Italy.

"They had no hate in their hearts for the Pope or for the Church. They were good Christians, but they conspired, as we all did then, for the sake of the unity of Italy, against the government of the Pope. They were caught, thrown in prison, and condemned

to die. When they climbed the gallows and bent their heads on the block, I turned my eyes in horror, and, across the square, at a window of the Vatican palace, I saw, through the gilded pane, the old white priest watching the scene with a smile!"

Whether this event took place as he described it, or whether his imagination made him see more than what actually happened, I cannot say. The two men were indeed executed, and most of the details of their executions are confirmed by historical records. What struck me deeply at the time was the reference he made to the old white Pope, gazing from behind the panes of the Vatican at the two men mounting the scaffold. This image contrasted vividly with my conception of him as a man and as a minister of God. It shook my faith in the Church itself.

The Pope had been an enemy of Italy, had fought and hunted Garibaldi, had called the Austrians, the French, and the Spaniards against his own country, had led to the gallows men whose only guilt was loving Italy. How could I reconcile these facts with the theory that he was the expounder of the word and the will of Christ? I made up my mind that I would question the parish priest some day and find out from him what truth there was in the tales of my friend the carpenter. I felt I should not take his statements too seriously. He was an excitable man and bound to be partial. Still, he had an earnest expression in his face when he spoke, and some of his stories were in perfect accord with my books at school.

I knew the parish priest well. His name was Don Lanza. He had a small house outside the village, by the little chapel of the Madonna. He also had a garden enclosed by a brick wall. Above the wall spread the branches of two cherry trees. Don Lanza had caught me once on top of the wall stealing cherries and had helped me to get down by the aid of a whip. Bianca Maria had made me ask his pardon, and donate the contents of my little bank to the chapel as an expiatory gift.

I had since become quite friendly with Don Lanza and visited him often in his garden. He had a certain culture and his conversation was pleasant. At the period I am referring to I was about fifteen and busy with Latin and Greek. He was well versed in these languages and often we talked classic poetry. I felt uneasy for a time about questioning him in regard to the arguments that perplexed me. I knew he was inflexible in his opinions, and, on account of his age and his dignity, I would feel at a disadvantage in a discussion with him. One evening, when he was sitting alone in his garden, I ventured to tell him about the two gallows, also about the fight at Villa Pamphili and the boys who had died there, and of Garibaldi. He turned red, stared at me and said, "Garibaldi was a brigand!" And as I opened my eyes aghast, he continued: "Garibaldi was a scoundrel! His men were bandits; they had no law, they had no principles, they tried to rob the Pope of his lawful rights. If they were killed, they got what they deserved." I replied, "How is it, then, that the statue

of Garibaldi is in every town of Italy and his name in the heart of every Italian?" He retorted: "For the last thirty years they have been glorifying the man who led the fight against the Church. All sorts of misrepresentations have been made to justify an act that was nothing but plain robbery." Then he heaped abuses on the house of Savoy, called Cavour a foxy scoundrel, Mazzini a renegade, Victor Emanuel a brainless tool in the hands of his wicked ministers. I sat silent, speechless with astonishment, unable to find any argument. I thought of the carpenter's tales and of the doctor's too, of my books at school, and I made up my mind that I had better not try to learn more Italian history, if I didn't want to run the danger of going mad.

V

INCOHERENCE

I HAVE put in evidence, by this little episode, the animosity between the old Garibaldino and the parish priest of Castelbetto, because this may give an idea of the curious state of mind in which I found myself in those days. I was attached to the Catholic Church because of her mystic spell, the deep poesy of her ritual, and her inspired theory of charity and love, but, as an Italian and a man of free reason, I could not help feeling hostile to the principles of absolute authority for which she had stood and fought in the political field, and for which she stands and fights in the field of thought.

There is no doubt that, during the reaction that followed the unsuccessful revolution of '48-'49, the activities of the Church were altogether antagonistic to any movement for the liberty of Italy. The Pope in Rome made common cause with Austria and with the King of Naples, and didn't hesitate to apply their methods of repression whenever he found it necessary. During my early youth, the memories of this sad period of Italian life were still alive in the hearts of those who had witnessed the events. The liberal party in Italy could not help being antagonistic to

the Church and to the Catholic party on political grounds. Quite often both of them were carried by their animosity to extend the fight from the political into the religious field.

The Italian flag was not allowed to adorn the altar of God. This of course provoked on the opposite side a display of scorn for the Church and its ministers. Squabbles were the common thing in those days. This state of affairs could not but be detrimental to the moral authority of the Church on us of the young generation. People have often noticed that the best thinking classes in Italy seem to be drifting away from the Church. One witnesses the curious phenomenon of a country which has been the cradle of the Catholic religion being now indifferent or agnostic. Evidently the intolerant attitude of the Vatican on political matters accounts to a great extent for this state of affairs, though a more conciliatory spirit seems to prevail in recent years.

In any case, there will always be a tendency among the intelligent classes of Italians to depart from the teachings of the Church. Notwithstanding outside appearances, most of us are still pagans at heart. I don't mean pagans in the sense of sacrificing white oxen to Jupiter or lambs to Ceres, but because of the spirit that beauty and nature keep alive in us. From the poems of Horace, from the divine forms of the Florentine marbles, from the black eyes of our maidens, from our skies and our rich sunlight come to us conceptions of beauty that warm our souls like the presence of pantheistic gods. Mythical creatures

are alive in us. We feel them, and know them and identify them with the forms that populate the pages of Ovid, the galleries of Rome and Florence. Most of them have no name, vague figures that spring alive from an hexameter verse, or come with the sunbeams through the limbs of a tree, or creep on us in the still shadows of evening. In the summer days out on our plains, they fill the space. The little sermons of my friend Don Lanza couldn't keep them away.

How I remember those Sundays in June! I used to sit in our pew in one of the side chapels of the church, and listen to Don Lanza preaching. Across the nave, in the opposite wall, there was a stained glass Gothic window. From my seat I faced the window. Huge stone pillars rose towards the ceiling and the walls were painted with sorrowful pictures of saints and martyrs. Even on those bright mornings, the interior of the church was gloomy. But through the rosy panes across the nave I saw the smile of Phœbus, the grand light of the sun, pouring in from the skies outside.

From his pulpit Don Lanza preached sacrifice and penitence, tried to impress the audience with the sublime value of sorrow and renouncement, made a mournful picture of our life, present and future. I was young, I was healthy, I loved life and its joys! I looked at the priest and gazed at his black coat without feeling the point of his talk. Beautiful images blossomed before me like flowers through the gloom of the church. The pagan cry of youth rose violently from the depths of my heart: *Gaudeamus*

igitur, juvenes dum sumus! Suddenly, across the nave, the sun struck a note of red, blinding me with a beam of magnificent glory. I no longer saw the painful pictures or heard Don Lanza. I saw the light, the eternal light, the joy of men! In vain the stony walls of the church tried to keep it out, in vain did Don Lanza warn us against temptations. From the open door came the breeze, the scent of the fields, the Pan-like spirit of summer, and now and then the song, far away, of a girl in the fields. Under these conditions, how can one expect a boy of seventeen to take seriously the statement that life holds for him mortification and sacrifice?

Notwithstanding that pagan substratum in my make-up, I would not have missed my mass for one Sunday. As I said before, I felt the mystic spell of the Church, the deep poesy of her ritual, maybe the fear of hell. After all, I was somewhat impressed by the way our religion holds power over souls by superstition and fear. Don Lanza spoke in the name of Christ, though his Christ was an inaccessible figure of dogma, shaped by the perverted imagination of the Middle Ages, quite in contrast with the prophet of Galilee, whom I loved. His representations found their way into my imagination, as the gloomy Byzantine rites intruded themselves into the pure primitive forms of our cult. His statements didn't fail to distort my soul and, in later years, they had great weight on some important decisions of my life.

Most of the audience in the church were women. The men stood back by the door, some outside, sitting on the steps, holding their hats in their hands. They were blessed with the simple indifference of the peasant who does not care much for anything but his crops. They went to church as a matter of course, because on Sunday one goes to church, and knelt down, when the bell rang, or crossed themselves. Their minds were not there much, though. While attending the service, they did not lose sight of what was going on in the street and in the fields. They greeted their friends as they went by, "Hello Tommaso, hello Michele," commented on the team of oxen that passed, watched the antics of stray dogs, surveyed the sky for signs of the coming weather, and now and then they spat on the floor. When the service was over, they put on their hats and, climbing down the steps, stopped for a while in the street in front of the church. Here, gathered together in little groups, they discussed the weather, the crops, and local politics.

We owned a large property in the vicinity of Castelbetto which had belonged to our family for generations. Most of it was rented out, but part of the rent was paid in produce and we had quite a little to say about the cultivation of the land and the raising of cattle.

When I came out of the church with my brothers, some of our tenants who had come to the village for the service approached us on some matters pertaining to the farms—asked for a new roof on the barn, announced the birth of a calf, the engagement of a

daughter. At times they had a gift for us, a few chickens or a basket of eggs. As I loved the country, I often took long walks to see the work in the fields, thus getting in close contact with the patriarchal life of the peasants. I was at that time following the course of classical studies in Turin during the winter. With a feeling of marvelous joy I was gaining access to Greek and Latin poetry. The exquisite beauty of some Lucretian episodes, the charm of Virgil often read in the calm of my room, had evoked in me images of peaceful plains and georgic scenes—and again the contemplation of the plains aroused in me memories of their neat distichs, of their immortal lays.

VI

A POEM

FIELDS and meadows, woods and vineyards of Castelbetto that offered so many delights to my heart and to my eyes, vast, noble plain which I loved, humble land torn and wrought by centuries of human toil, I wish to praise your humble glory, for the sake of gratitude and the feeling that binds my heart to you. I have not forgotten the red sunsets of August, filling the sky with a glow like fire, or the silvery moonlights of September. In the calm nights the melody of the crickets and the frogs rose soft from meadows and fields, from creeks and pools, now and then broken by the lonely song of a late traveler on the road. I have not forgotten the trails and the lanes, and the long line of willows by the pond, where the farmer's boy took the cows to drink.

How far those things are from me now! Yet how near to my heart! Showers of August, soft breezes of April, still harmony of autumn evenings, what voices, what calls, what wonderful poems did I hear from you that have left in my heart an imperishable echo? Was it the music of the wind through the foliage, or of the rain from the passing clouds, as it hit the leaves of the oaks and the cedars and the thick

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bushes of laurel, raising a soft murmur from one, a silver sound from the other, and a long modulated tone from the other again? The woods were an immense harp under the hand of the wind. I wandered and listened and let the rain wet my face and my hands, enveloping me in its freshness. I was a part of you—woods, clouds, nature! Every human care, every human desire dropped from me. I lost my name, my conscience, my will, myself—I felt my soul sway in the wind with the trees.

But the meridian glory of the sunny days brought me a spirit of unlimited joy. "Come to us and forget human cares, forget human sorrows" sang the nymphs of the woods, sang the nymphs of the plain. "We know the secrets of your heart, O pensive youth! We know what thirst torments your soul, how great your desires, how little your power! Come and rest in the shadow. We will blend your thoughts with the immense harmony of this wide plain, make you the equal of the youthful gods, Endymion, the beloved of Selene or Hylas, the son of the Mysian king, whom we stole from Heracles!

"He walked, the uncouth youth, to the pool, among the thick verdure. Still on the surface did the lilies float, red glowed the dusk through the foliage. He lowered his golden amphora into the water. His blond hair flowed on his shoulders, his eyes reflected the deep blue of the pool. He listened to the melodies of the evening. Slowly the cup glided out of his hand and sank through the green weeds. He leaned and leaned. His lips touched the surface. The white

arms of the nymph rose silently from the water and closed around his neck. A haze veiled his eyes. Softly the arms closed tighter and tighter, drawing him to the eternal depths of oblivion where calm and peace reign! Come and have peace!"

Thus I evoked the gentle myth of the Mysian youth, thus I heard the voices of the nymphs and saw their eyes, blue and deep, in the shadows. I felt them glide around me, fan me with their veils. I lay on the edge of the pond in the thick verdure, and watched to see, through the clear water, if perhaps the white arms of the naiad would rise and take me away.

VII

DE PROFUNDIS

In that same plain of Castelbetto I found myself, fifteen years later, in the gray light of a November day, alone by the grave of my mother just dead. Mist lay on the plain, snow on the far-off mountains. The long lament of the wind through the poplars, the scent of faded flowers, and the dripping of moisture from the trees made my loneliness more acute. By the grave of my mother I stood alone. Alone I walked towards the village, on the deserted road. No sound came through the mist but that of the church bells, calling to the service in memory of her who had gone.

Ten days before, I had received a cable in New York calling me to her bedside. I had hurried across. When I reached Cherbourg a telegram was handed me, saying that she had died the day before. Died, my mother! In the bustle of the landing I hardly realized what the news meant. Pushed about by the people trying to get on the tender, busy myself with my baggage, and soaked by the rain that was falling heavily at that moment, I was dazed.

On the tender, crossing the harbor, the hard blow of the news began to affect me—my nerves gave way

under the strain of the emotion. I stood in the crowd, crushed, dumb, gazing stupidly towards the shore, tears streaming from my eyes. It was late evening. The water was rough, the rain thick and blinding, now and then the land appeared in a tragic flash of lightning—that land of Europe whose outlines I had beheld with a flutter of joy every time I had come back to my dear ones, sweet land of France which I had crossed so many times on my way home with a heart full of joy and expectation. I wouldn't see my mother this time! Wouldn't see her again! The news of her death recalled the circumstances of my past visits home—her face that I found a little changed each time, a few more wrinkles, a few more white hairs, but with the same expression of love and candor. Now, by a strange aberration of memory, I couldn't quite recall the outlines of her face. They grew confused, hazy, almost as though forgotten. The more I tried to get a clear vision, the more it seemed to get away from me.

What? Had I perhaps forgotten my mother? A keen regret tore my heart for having neglected her during the last ten years I had lived away from her, intent on making money. Now she had died without my having seen her. During the trip across France that regret tormented me; I was a bad son. Did she know before dying that I was coming? Did she think of me, the absent one, before she closed her eyes forever on the last visions of this world?

At home in Turin on my arrival, the sight of my desolate brothers and of the familiar surroundings

made her present to me all the time. Over and over again I was on the verge of asking: "Where is she?" She was not there to give me her kiss. The day before my brothers and sisters had taken her to Castelbetto, to lay her in the family tomb. I said I would go the next day to take her flowers. I sent word to the curate of the village to hold a service for her in the chapel of the Madonna.

How sad the plain appeared to me on that gray day of November! How bleak the cemetery, as I walked towards the gate! Inside, by the grave just closed, the flowers of the wreaths were fading; everything was bleak, dreary, dead! The wall, all green with ivy in summer, showed now, through the bare branches, the dingy plaster full of cracks; bare and rigid stood the poplars by the wall. Now and then, from the bushes of boxwood a bird flew off with the swift glide of an arrow through the mist. Mist and mist, mist and mist, like a gray sea without bottom or shore, covered the plain. As I walked back towards the village in the gray immensity, I felt lost, a pale phantom of myself. Was that the plain of old—my sweet plain of Piedmont? Was I myself?

A shiver ran through my body. Strange mysterious sounds came from the gray sea of mist, cries of birds, long wails of a dog lost somewhere, far or near, Lord knew where! Lord knew where! I shivered again. The trees along the road seemed to look at me with a hard human expression—"Who are you, stranger, lost in this mist?" A big gray larch, bent by the wind, seemed to stretch his twisted limbs to hold me. I

shivered and ran a few steps, frightened—the trees seemed to grow more threatening.

"Why do you threaten me, trees? I am no stranger. I am he who sat in your shade many a time, and watched the sunset through your foliage, listening to the birds and to the rustling of the wind in your leaves."

No sign or movement came from them—they stood still and mute, they that had been the companions of my happy days, that were so alive then with leaves, so merry with birds! I said: "I am the one, dear trees, who used to recite poems in your friendly shadows, weaving sweet dreams. I am changed now. I have become sensible and wise."

"You are wise, eh?" and a doubtful swaying moved their limbs. "You are wise?"

I stood silent, my head bent. I was wise, surely! I had become wise during the last ten years. But I had not seen the sun rise and fall on our inspiring lands, or the hawthorn bloom along the hedges, or the wheatfields roll under the June wind, nor heard, in the late evenings, the melodies of the plain, the soft flute of the nightingales, the song of lone men weaving willow baskets by the doorsill in the moonlight. The streams of poesy that had flowed into me from those things I had allowed to dry.

Before me stood the old trees, once so friendly. I heard their inexorable voices: "You are wise, but your face is pale, and in your eyes are the signs of many cares! What have you done with the other one who was you?"

And the one who was once I looked into my eyes, passed his light fingers over every chord of my heart. He was the blossom and I was the fruit. On that plain of old I had a vision of him, and I sighed with regret for having let him die within me.

Slowly I walked along the road towards Castelbetto. When I went into the little chapel it was already full of people. I walked through the nave. All eyes gazed with naïve curiosity on the man who had left home one day long ago, and was now back to pray with his people for his mother. They saw his pale face, perhaps the lines on his brow. He stood silent, except that now and then a little quiver of emotion passed over him. In the mystic silence that precedes the beginning of the service a bell rang; the priest came out and walked up the steps of the altar. Then he turned and lifted his hand for the blessing. From the audience rose the song of appeal, the imploring cry to God:

De profundis clamavi ad te, Domine.
Domine exaudi vocem meam!

VIII

OUR LAND

His conception of Italy is something almost supernatural. It partakes of earth and heaven, and he seems to be bound to men and gods of that land, by joys and sorrows, from times immemorable."

In these recollections I have given a prominent part to the plain of Piedmont, as it is there where most of my youth was spent. Still I feel associated, either by personal experience or by intellectual bonds, with every section of Italy and with every period of its history. In the Emilian plain I have known the line of poplars that were sisters to Phaëton. In the Ætnean valley I have heard the long lament of Demetra, calling for her lost daughter Persephone. When March comes, she, the Bride-queen of Hades, returns with her arms full of roses, full of hawthorn and Sicilian heather. She brings flowers to the bees, grass to the flocks, joy to men. Her slender figure is seen in the glory of spring, passing from hill to hill.

I have known the mythical tale of our origins! How from the union of a god and a nymph our forefathers were born—those simple men who first laid eyes on the enchanted land, who broke the silence of the hills

felling oaks for their shelter, who led their plows through the plain, pastured their oxen on our grassy meadows, and raised prayers to the gods. On the top of our hills they stood at dawn by their rude altars of stone, and greeted the coming light: "Aurora," they sang, "O goddess of the pink arms, who rise from your bed of ivory and pass above hills and plains, bring us dew for the flowers and for the meadows where our flocks graze, bring us light and life!" Thus they sang in their naïve faith. Thus do our people still sing to the Dawn, with the same spirit that grouped our Pelasgian fathers around their rustic altars.

Those altars of the primordial cult are still to be seen on our hills by the Tyrrhenian Sea—those square stones on which a white lamb was offered to the gods every year in the spring. Beside them the Rasenian shepherds watched for the Phœnician sails, bringing from Tyre and Carthage the wares of the Orient. And from there one day they saw the last warrior of Troy appear on the blue sea in his magnificent armor of silver, carrying with him the gods of his land for the destinies of Rome.

It was from the ruins of the Eternal City that I had my best teachings, and its dumb marbles were my greatest masters. I read with passionate love the words carved on the front of its temples. From them I got the imprint of Latin wisdom upon my soul. Pervaded by the sacred spirit of my race, I removed with my own hands the crust of centuries, to decipher

the inscriptions on the slabs half covered with grass and ivy. In the hall of the Chiaramonti Gallery the sublime gesture of Augustus made me feel that every action of my life should conform to that most noble ideal of dignity.

The barbaric invasions were revealed to me by Northern stately rhythms, intertwined with glowing Latin melodies: "First Alaric the Great humbled the pride of Rome—led his men to the sack of the city. He lies dead now in our sweet land of the cedars, under the clear water of the Calabrian river. A thousand Roman slaves turned the stream from its course and dug a royal hall for him in its stone bed. There they lowered his body in full armor astride his horse, then let the stream flow back within its banks, so that no Roman hand might ever touch the grave of the warrior!"

Thus runs the legend. Thus perhaps it was told from mouth to mouth along the banks of the Weser, in the plains of Germany, fifteen hundred years ago. From those plains new conquerors came, descended upon our valleys and into our smiling lands to strike and burn. I hear the gallop of their horses, the clattering of their arms. I can see the barbarian women, fair and blonde, passing in their chariots, singing songs of hate. I see their lords striking blows, sinking blades into flesh, tearing human limbs, and over our fertile plains I see desolation and squalor!

Upon that desert, one spirit arises to join both the

winners and the vanquished by the still power of calm love.

I wish I could convey the inmost essence of the forces that, in those dark days of Italy, lifted the human soul above the sorrows of life. Men of infinite love sought communion with God everywhere, on top of the mountains, in caves, in the hollows of trees. They lived in penitence and prayer, humble, but greater than the greatest on earth. They had no armed force, but the influence of their inspired words.

In the great solitudes of nature, under the immense vault of heaven, they drew from the deep silences power superhuman. They ripened for the centuries to come the mystic spirit that was to inspire Dante and Raphael, the spirit in which my heart still finds consolation and repose from the fatigue of life.

Remarkable and beautiful indeed were those days of my early youth—perhaps the noblest part of my life—all given to the contemplation of our past, fortified by the love of nature and beauty and historical greatness, matured by solitude, and dreams, and silence.

I don't know any greater tragedy than the one which befell Italy during those centuries. A pall of darkness spread over the land. Joy, beauty, art were obliterated. The Latin soul sank into a bleak sea of miseries. From that bleak depth I have heard voices, I have seen sad phantoms emerge, dumb and terrible. Laments of lone monks were conveyed to me by the

faded characters of manuscript parchments. Figures appeared to me on the carved portals of the Gothic churches—horrid forms, listless eyes, disproportionate limbs, monstrous attempts to render the human shape, once glorified by the chisels of Greece and Rome!

The year One Thousand comes to Italy like the light of dawn after centuries of darkness. It had seemed as though that light would never appear. Innumerable superstitions, bred by five hundred years of dejection, pointed to the first day of the new millennium as the time marked for the end of the world. The prophesies of Christ, the books of St. John and St. Paul, and the visions of the early mystics all agreed upon giving to mankind these thousand years of life and no more. After a thousand years the call would come and God, sitting on His throne, would judge for Eternity the living and the dead. Of what use to strive? Preparing for death was all there was of life—the rest, vanity! Thus preached the monks, in that sad decadence of the human spirit, and the multitude, neglecting the works of life, the joys of love, lay idly in the expectation of the end.

Then, on that first morning of the year One Thousand, the sun rose! And so it rose the next day, and the next again! The immense pall of fear that had been hovering on the dejected multitudes was lifted —once again human eyes turned from the idle contemplation of the skies to things of earth, to our fine hills, our plains, the blue waters of the Tyrrhenian

Sea. The end had not come! A new force of hope lifted the Latin race from the stagnant depth into which the violence of the barbarians and the degrading influence of fear had plunged it. From that time the real history of the Italian people begins.

The maritime cities of Italy had already experienced a long tradition of democratic rule. The islands of the Laguna had given shelter, in the fifth century, to the refugees fleeing from the hordes of Attila and they had established there the foundations for the future republic of Venice. Four hundred years later they joined in one commonwealth, stood against all menaces of barbaric violence, and carried the lion of St. Mark triumphantly over the seas.

The republics of Naples and Amalfi dated back from the eighth century, and one century later Genoa and Pisa had organized under popular government and acquired fame by beating the Saracens of Africa. Now all over the peninsula, in the renewed dawn of the world, the vanquished, the oppressed, the servant of all conquerors, sought, from the neglected memories of Latin life, the elements required for renewing the glory of the race. They created as many republics as there were steeples of churches, and developed democratic institutions under their own magistrates, breaking loose from the German dependence. When the Suabian Emperor, Frederick Barbarossa, descended into the plain of Lombardy from the passes of the Alps, to claim for the Imperial Crown homage and contributions from the new commonwealths,

they joined in the defense of their free institutions and stood united against the blows of the imperial rage.

The story of that first century of the new millennium is a magnificent epic, narrating the fight between the Emperor of Suabia and the Commons of Northern Italy, defending their liberties.

The house of Suabia still stands in history bound to the Italian people with the tenderest links of love and poetry. Did not the white arms of the girl Lucia make sweet the imprisonment of King Enzio in Bologna and her love console him for his lost crown? Did not Frederick the Second make his own the soft language and the passionate spirit of his Sicilian kingdom and lay the foundation of the structure of the new Italian literature? That German, transplanted into the land of the orange and the laurel, midst the traditions still alive of the Greek muses, sang the first verses from which was to develop, within less than one hundred years, the magnificence of the Divina Commedia.

In that dawn of Italy the wave of poesy born on the steps of Frederick's throne and spreading toward the north of the peninsula met there the wave of beauty rising, midst the glitter of arms, from the liberties of the new Commons. Towers and belfries rose to the skies to protect the life of the new cities, palaces were built to house their elected rulers, ethereal cathedrals lifted their white marbles to convey the gratitude of the redeemed souls to God.

While the ships of the free republics were bringing gems from the Orient to the glory of the Virgin, from under the chisels of Nicola Pisano the Virgin Mary emerged, clothed in the immortal veils of a Greek goddess. A new spirit of faith and art, a soft oblivion of the past struggles pervades the people of Italy. One man, perhaps the greatest of all Italians, has revealed to them their new soul—the man who preached to the fishes and the swallows, who made the wolf lick his hand, who called his brothers and sisters the sky, the sun, the stars, the wind, the birds, and death, the lover of hills and plains, of friends and enemies, of everybody and everything—San Francesco d'Assisi!

San Francesco d'Assisi! The fair land of Umbria is the home of pure love. There under the sky ethereal rises his church, and we feel him, the saint, around and above us and, as an ever-present spirit, within us. Because he is part of the land, and when silence descends and the time is ripe, he comes into our souls. He comes as a spirit above anything human, charity and love, harmony between earth and heavens, hymn and prayer, song of creatures, of waters, of winds!

He, the simplest man who ever lived, opened with his humble hands the doors of the *Rinascimento*. He taught the people of Italy the deep love of nature, which is the keynote of the season that runs from his days, in a crescendo of glory, to the splendors of Raphael. Standing on the edge of his native Umbrian

hills and spreading his arms towards the world, he salutes it with his song. He salutes the birds that fly, the trees that shelter them, and the green Umbrian plain at his feet. In his breast is gathered the throb of universal life.

Letters and arts, under the influence of his preaching, depart from old traditions; men acquire the conscience of their own intimate feelings and burn with the desire of expressing them. This tendency finds its expounders in Cimabue and Giotto, Nicola Pisano, Jacopone da Todi, and, by the close of the century, in that Florentine youth whom we see first trembling under the look of Beatrice, he who was to become the greatest of any man of Latin blood—Dante Alighieri!

In mediæval life men did not have a personality of their own. They belonged to their *Comune* and were intimate parts of it, as the figures in a bas-relief are intimate parts of the stone from which they are carved. There is no representation of art of that period conveying to us a conception endowed with individual character. Dante is the first to present to our imagination the great figures of his sinners, standing in full against the red glare of hell, like statues carved from the block. He himself appears to us alone under the sky of Tuscany, carrying within his pensive forehead the thought of his sacred work. But through that thirteenth century all over Italy men begin to assert their personality. The birth of Italian art took place in those days.

The first one whom we see is the shepherd Giotto. He appears in the golden morning among his flocks, stretching his arms toward the dawn, singing with simple faith the humble words of St. Francis in praise of all creatures. Along the walls of the convent church in Assisi the shepherd boy grown into a man painted the Saint—feeding the birds, preaching to the fishes of the sea, opening his arms lovingly to embrace all creatures. He was the friend of Dante, his companion in the days of exile. While the poet built the greatest monument of our language, Giotto conveyed to us through his frescoes the expression of all the mystic ideals, all the religious fervor of the Italy of his day.

Thus we know our first great artist, thus his pupil Andrea Orcagna, sculptor and painter, who was the precursor of those great men of the next century. But perhaps we may admire more the genius of Arnolfo da Cambio, master of all Italian architects, whose four monuments rising over Florence still seem to gather within them the very soul of the city—St. Maria del Fiore, Palazzo Vecchio, St. Croce, Orsammichele. Or perhaps Nicola Pisano, who folded around the Virgin Mary the Greek robe of Fedra, or Andrea, who carved the plowing oxen upon the side of the Campanile, or Giovanni who built the admirable house of eternal rest—the Camposanto di Pisa. Humble men they were; true impersonators of the purity and youth of art, they seem to have drawn out of the mediæval chaos the long-lost soul of beauty.

And in the course of a few score years, from their

impulse, beauty becomes the supreme aim toward which all efforts point. The democratic institutions of the Commons by and by give way to that new form of government that was to be both the glory and the shame of Italy—the Signoria. The Signore, be his name Federico de Montefeltro, wise and magnanimous, or Sigismondo Malatesta, mean and cruel, models his thoughts and actions upon the examples of classic culture. Around him he gathers artists and students, makes his palace the home of elegance and magnificence. Then the towns with republican institutions emulate him in beautifying public edifices. The Church itself is pervaded and vivified by the same spirit. Through the courts, in the castles, in the guildhalls, in the cathedrals, beauty spreads its ideal wings, becoming not only the ornament, but the prime necessity of life, extending its harmonic rule from the great walls covered with frescoes to the humblest cloisters.

The triumph of reason by the conquest of Platonic doctrines manifests itself in the proportion of lines, substitutes the dark symbols of mysticism for bright colors, air, and light, frees Italy from the bonds of the scholastic doctrines, and opens for her the great season of her new birth—the *Rinascimento!*

IX

IL RINASCIMENTO

In talking about the Italian *Rinascimento,* I find the number of expressions existing in the English language too limited to convey a full idea of the magnificence of that time, and I fear being led into repeating myself and making my tale monotonous and uninteresting. Fortunately, the variety of forms by which this marvelous fruit of Italian life manifested itself is such that a plain list of the great masterpieces should be, by itself, a vivid tale.

Is there any other place except Italy where the mere mention of a name, be it that of a man, town or thing, can call forth so complete a picture of what it belongs to, with all its vivid associations? Need I add another word when I say "Donatello"? At once you see the whole Bargello of Florence alive with his works! So Fiesole means Virgins of Mino and the mystic angels of Frate Giovanni, and, back in the landscape, silver groves of olive trees and the crescent of the moon! Fonte Gaia, ca' d'Oro, Certosa di Pavia! Isn't there a fine sound to these names placed together? They mean a fountain of Siena, a palace in Venice, and a church in the meadows of Lombardy,

no more similar to one another than a bird is to a tree or a river; still they belong to each other, for the one law of harmony that governs their lines, that characterizes the age in which they were built. Every work of that period, every memory, contains an incalculable sum of qualities in precise lines, representing at the same time the real and the ideal, the particular and the infinite, all that can be seen and all that can be imagined.

The bronze gates that Lorenzo Ghiberti created for the Battistero of Florence frame, within a realistic decoration of birds and foliage, the biblical scenes of the Old and New Testaments. They seem to swing open from this world of reality into the mystic spaces of heaven. The portrait that Piero della Francesca painted of Federico da Montefeltro presents the image of a man alive on the canvas with all his vigor, unique under the sun, and animated by the imperious dignity of his race. And the palace that Luciano da Laurana built for him in Urbino is an edifice worthy of housing the magnificence of such a man. Still, above him, above all his generation, stands the admirable, the friend and rival of Ludovico il Moro and Alfonso d'Aragona, the lover of art and war and beautiful women, the pride of the *Rinascimento*, Lorenzo il Magnifico!

Lorenzo il Magnifico! I like to say this beautiful name aloud—as at night I call the stars by name—"La Vega, Sirius, Aldebaran," as I call the names of Griselda and Melusina, of Diana and of the tacit

Persephone, for the love of the sound, for the love of the dreams that the sound evokes. Never do I say the name of the Magnifico that I do not see my youthful dreams of Florence arise before me!

X

MY YOUTHFUL DREAMS OF FLORENCE

I HAD spent a part of the summer along the seashore, between Nervi and Santa Margherita, boating and sailing and basking on the rocks, and part climbing mountains and tramping the valleys of the Alps. During that sweet season of early November that you call Indian summer and we name "estate di San Martino," I was visiting friends at their country place on the hills above Florence. It was in a villa of the fifteenth century, splendid in its lines and in the beauty of its fittings. From the front terrace one could see on the south the hills of Chianti, the Val d'Ema; on the north Fiesole, and in the valley of the Arno below, Florence, set like a gem. A few cypresses here and there stamped their elegant forms against the sky, but most of the landscape was gray and blond with withering olive trees and birches.

We were five young people in the house, four boys and one girl. One of the boys and the girl were brother and sister, and their mother was our hostess. The girl's name was Oretta. Between us there was that freedom that long friendship allows. The girl was twenty, and of all the creatures I have ever known she was one of the finest. Each of us had a

soft spot in his heart for her, but each one controlled his feelings for the sake of the general harmony. Now and then, though, we couldn't help getting into a fray or a scuffle, apparently for some futile motive, but in reality for the sake of showing our skill before her. Of course, ours weren't vulgar rows, but contests toned to the dignity and the traditions of the place.

Thus one day two of us out on a ride, catching sight of Oretta going into a chapel about half a mile off, spurred our horses and raced towards her, trying to knock each other out of the saddle. As we approached the church I pushed the other fellow over a fence and raced straight to the altar, thus renewing the deed of Bartolo Doni, when he stole the bride of Masuccio the day of her wedding. Another time, we tried a *beffa* on one of the boys using the very stile that the friends of Cesare Borgia used. Having caught him under Oretta's window in a sentimental attitude, we gagged him and tied him to a tree while we serenaded the girl.

Our lives were on simple lines, healthy and free, all the physical temerity of youth being just tempered by the sobering atmosphere of the beautiful things among which we lived. We arose before dawn and met at the stable, where the footmen and the boys held the horses ready. The hounds, from behind the railings of the kennel, barked madly, crazed with excitement. As we let them free, there was mad racing in every direction, while the boys yelled and whistled trying to get the pack together. Above the

tops of Pratomagno by and by the ball of the sun lifted itself, and a smile of fresh light ran over the country: over Fiesole, all rosy on the opposite hills, over the white walls of the villas, over the silver bark of the birches, over the vines hanging from tree to tree. Jumping to our saddles, out we went through fields and groves, along the trails of Mount Ripaldi, down through Val d'Ema, then up into the hills of Chianti, vivified by the race, fresh with all the vigor of our healthy youth. We imagined ourselves to be perhaps the band of Pandolfo Petrucci, the morning they ran suddenly into Siena and took the city by surprise while the defenders were asleep; or perhaps some party from Florence, bent upon stealing girls in Greve or San Casciano just for defiance and fun.

The presence of Oretta did not temper the wildness of our rides. She was a sport, a "regular" girl as you would say. She did not mind being compared to that Marietta Strozzi of her family, who used to challenge the young courtiers of Lorenzo il Magnifico, and one night from the balcony of her palace held a snowball battle with three of them and put all three to flight. She had a grace all her own, however, and some of us having found a resemblance between her and the figures that Sandro Botticelli put in his pictures, she dressed as the girl who, in the "Allegoria della Primavera," walks over the flowery grass with an elegance without equal. At times she appeared with a branch of roses in her mouth, imitating the other girl in the picture, the one whom the boy with

. . . MAKING THE TUSCAN LANDSCAPE A BACKGROUND TO HER BEAUTY. . . .

the swollen cheeks tries to grasp from behind. One of us, for fun, pretended to be that boy and stretched his arms toward her waist. Another one assumed the attitude of the man that picks the fruit from the tree, trying to look as handsome. This was partly for fun, and partly for youthful vanity. No false modesty with us! We well knew the words of Michelangelo: "The only subject worthy of admiration is the human body," and in that place of Michelangeloesque memories we felt proud, not vain, of our healthy fitness.

This explanation is for us, the boys, for of course there was no reason for Oretta to be anything else but proud of her beauty, such being the privilege of all girls of all times and places. How well she made use of that privilege, I can hardly say. She knew how to sit on a window ledge at sunset time framing herself in the marble bow, and making the whole Tuscan landscape outside a background to her beauty. If you are familiar with the works of Pietro Perugino, you know how well those soft undulations of a land with a few slender trees, here and there, adapt themselves to such an effect. From Pietro Perugino she also got the inspiration for her choice in the neck line of her dresses—the square cut fits well under a perfect oval. She looked particularly well when sitting in one of those savonarola chairs which are shaped like an X, and, being rather hard and of little comfort, make the sitter hold herself erect, with the hands braced against the sides. I don't know why, but I often remember her in that pose.

One might perhaps point out that I seem to remem-

ber her in a good many poses, and surmise that I was more interested in her than I admitted to be. I wouldn't be surprised at all if such was the case. I believe, however, that it was the whole ensemble of beauty amid which we lived that had conquered me.

Florence, down in her nest, had a magic spell for me. At times I stole away early in the morning, stealthily, before anybody was up, and walked down to seek her, furtively, like a lover to his beloved. I wandered, lost, through the deserted streets, seeking the memories of the past, gazing at the Dantesque inscriptions, passing my hands over the bronze of the statues, trying to get upon my mortal flesh the stamp of the ideal life that animated them. Inside the churches I sought the aroma of the incense, and saw the first glimpses of the sunlight break through the shadows of the naves. At times a wave of sound enveloped me from the belfries above. And one morning I had a supreme revelation of the transcendental power of art. The two heirs of Lorenzo il Magnifico stood before me: Il Pensieroso, immersed in a deep melancholy, in tragic meditation, Giuliano, wrapped in a triumphal haze, symbol of all the glory of life! Below were the four allegories of mystery called Night and Day, Dusk and Dawn, the Night, lying in the shadow of death, forever immersed in a sleep that nothing will break—image of all the nights that have gone upon the earth, of the eternal night that will, some day, come upon us.

One by one I penetrated the secrets of those great

masters who spread the light of the Italian genius over Europe—Raphael, Leonardo, Michelangelo (and Europe was then throwing on Italy the fetters that were to shackle her for centuries!). I went through churches and loggias, into cloisters, along the banks of the Arno, alone, wrapped in contemplation, a stranger to every one about me. Then I started for home haunted by all the visions of beauty. I followed deserted trails, not feeling fit to meet people—or perhaps feeling that people were not fit to meet me.

From the low lands just broken by the plow rose that mist that carries with it melancholy and dreams, but on the top of the hills the sun threw sparkling colors of joy, animating the tints of autumn with throbs of life. In the great silence, broken only by the sound of my step, the trail didn't seem to lead me anywhere but into the inmost depths of my own self, to find once more the images of art that I had left below by the banks of the Arno. In the calm solitude those images relived a mysterious life that drew into itself my whole self. I seemed to be a part of the ideal past. How shall I ever convey that correspondence between the forms of art and me? I let the spell flow through my veins with the rhythmic flow of my blood—let it take full possession of me. In my interior world, the tacit play of my thoughts seemed to develop independently of my will. I dreamed, I dreamed. Then a voice from a field or the rustling of a tree made a whole edifice of dreams collapse and a new one arise, the con-

tact with a superior world having loosened all the bonds between the elements of my fantasy and of my culture.

Oh you, born on this side of the ocean, these ways of feeling will never be disclosed to you! Life has hard realities for people here—contending with them matters! Dreaming is labor lost.

Still, that fantastic life that I lived on those hills of Florence one bygone autumn, might through my description, appeal to some recondite side of your soul. You have hills here and fine autumn days. You have some scenery suitable for developing the play of the latent attitudes that link us to the infinite. My lines may perhaps reveal to you a new way of feeling the landscape. The hills, the trees, the fence, the sky, the evening silence, might now, perhaps, have for you a beauty that you didn't detect before, because I have added to their presence the note of the past, the nostalgia of the far away, the divine harmony of those Tuscan hills, a heart-throb of Italy.

I have done it with little art, as the language that I am using is a difficult tool for me to handle. I wish I could use that of my home land, the language that I know and love. You can detect its presence, no doubt, in this work, under the English coating that vests it. It can be as soft as clay, as hard as bronze, that language of mine. It can be bent as a willow, drawn as a cobweb, cut sharp as a crystal, poured as an oil, flung as a stone from a sling. How it has flowed into my ears like divine music some nights

from a mouth beloved, vying with the notes of the nightingales! How it has broken with terrific force from my lips, under the violence of my ire! One word of it at times could awake in me an image, then another, then another, like the flame and the mirrors, like the sound and the echoes. One sentence could make my heart beat fast within my breast, could arouse within me a sudden tumult of desires and passions; one verse could lead me into a world of mystery, beyond the limits of death and silence. So musical it sounds! It rivals the play of the violin and the flute. It evokes indefinite shapes, mysterious visions and apparitions. It can imitate the rain in the woods, the dawning of the stars in the sky, the melody of the waves, the colors on the dove's neck, the gliding wing of Death.

How well they speak it on those hills of Tuscany! When returning from my visits to Florence, I stopped at a farmhouse outside the gates of the villa, to watch the children play, and to listen to them. Often the grown-up girls were there. I didn't mind having a few words with them, too. They looked so lovely besides speaking so well! One of them was engaged to be married. A flush spread over her face when I asked her about her coming wedding. "Signorino," she started, then went on talking of her plans and her hopes, going into naïve details, with that suave and graceful accent that places the Tuscan above all others in Italy when he talks. I listened to her, full of bliss, with an inward smile, thinking of the fowler who was going to capture that bird and of the melodies

that would be flowing into his ears from those lips in love, between kiss and kiss.

Then, a little further up, I sometimes stopped to say "How do you do?" to another friend of mine—Geppetto, an artisan of the old stamp. Out of a piece of boxwood or oak Geppetto could make, working within infinite patience and exquisite taste, a stool, a box, a cabinet, the handle for a cane. He sat by the threshold of the door to get the advantage of the sunset light as the shadows invaded his shop. He was plain and humble, but he spoke with a supreme elegance. He uttered maxims that might have fitted into the pages of Baldassare Castiglione or Pietro Bembo, sincere and original, not drawn from the reading of books and newspapers.

Across the way from his shop were the cellars of the villa. I invited him for a drink of Chianti: "Come on, Geppetto." He put down his work and his tools, took off his spectacles, and stuck them into a hole of the wall. Shaking the shavings from his apron, he walked across with me. We knocked at the door, "Tack, tack." From the bay window above appeared the face of Luca, the *cantiniere*. "Heh, Luca, here we are for a drink!" He trotted down obsequiously, all smiles and bows, and greeting us, "Signorino, Signorino," he pulled up three chairs to the fire, and got a platter, the glasses, and a napkin for me. The cellar was part of an edifice built at the same epoch as the villa. It was in reality a jewel of architecture, with such harmony of lines that few

palaces of our days could compete with it. A rotunda in the center opened through two archways into the galleries (I was going to say "naves") that constituted the cellar proper. The sides of the galleries were sustained by columns of white marble, and between column and column, on each side, stood the big casks of wine. These casks, of fine maple wood, were by themselves works of art, oval, well proportioned in every detail. They lay on oaken easels and each one bore a copper plate hanging by two chains, with its name on it—Sophonisba, Cleopatra, Berenice, Zenobia, Clio, Euterpe, Melusina, Griselda, Esther, Andromache, Cecilia Metella—names from the Bible, from Homer, from legends, from the history of Rome. Slightly different from one another in shape and in size, each one seemed to have a personality of its own. Each one had engraved on the side the year of the making and the name of the maker: 1520, 1545, 1605, 1650—Paulo Vallino *composit,* Leonardo Lucci *fecit, opus* Antoni Aretini. Those master coopers were proud of their work, as perhaps never were Phidias and Praxiteles of theirs. The rotunda was topped by a cupola, sustained by slight Doric columns. All around, above the columns, ran a decoration of bacchic children playing with vine tendrils and branches. They were squeezing the grapes, drinking the wine, frolicking with goats and monkeys, then falling into the happy sleep that jocund libations induce.

It was a gay place, that Rotunda, where Geppetto and Luca and I sat by the fire and divided amongst

us the contents of a *fiaschetto* of Chianti. The *fiaschetto* was selected with infinite care, after a ponderous discussion. The vintage, the locality, the color, the smell, were important data for the selection. At the shelves, Luca on a stool picked up a sample, read the date of the year, looked at it through the light, shook his head, put it back, pulled another, and made a choice of half a dozen, from which the final pick was made.

What a joy, that Chianti! Luca poured it into the glasses and handed me mine with a smile: "Signorino, Signorino!" Where could I ever get a bartender in New York to help me to such nectar with such grace? Through the window the rays of the setting sun drew from the glasses ruby gleams. On the fire the fagots crackled, but the wine glided down our throats without noise, like oil. Now and then from our lips sounded a smack of approval and satisfaction.

Upon leaving the little party I entered the villa through a back staircase that led to the gallery on the second floor. I didn't care to show my face down in the living room, after having been out all day playing truant—I went straight into the library, which I knew to be deserted at that time of the day. I felt like laying my eyes on some of those marvelous parchments, where, among the vivid miniatures of the Florentine masters, the ideas of the *Rinascimento* seemed to blaze out like flames. "O Prince! Catch thy fortune by the hair! Bring her down to thy feet!" I caught this cry from a page of Machiavelli

and a flame of fire went to my brain, as though the call were meant for me.

Also I sought in those pages the semblances of those *Rinascimento* girls whose figures we have seen in the canvases of Bronzino, in the medals of Pisanello. From the library opened the gallery which looked on to a square court below. It was surrounded by arcades, like a cloister, and in the middle there was a well. By and by, as I sat by the window there appeared between the columns exquisite figures evoked by the names Lucrezia Borgia, Beatrice d'Este, Giulia Farnese. Like marvelous visions they arose, alive with passion. Then the notes of a piano floated on the air. Oretta was playing in the next room. Then it was she that I saw—her face, her tall figure, in the splendid attire of the daughter of Alessandro VI, or of the bride of Lodovico il Moro.

Sometimes, while deep in my dreams, a light step would sound back of me and Oretta herself would appear. As I turned, she would sign for me not to move and, going to a shelf, she would pick out a book and sit down to read. There were no questions about my strange disappearances. She thought perhaps I had a sweetheart somewhere.

Keeping my eyes on my page, now and then I shot a furtive glance in her direction. Now and then I met a furtive glance in return. A thrill went through me. I suppose a thrill went through her. Thus Paolo and Francesca looked into each other's eyes and turned pale, while reading the book in the library of Gianciotto Malatesta. Francesca! I like to say this name,

while I evoke the memory of Oretta. Francesca de Rimini! The Dantesque symbol of passionate love looms before me against the western sky this warm evening of June, but her face is Oretta's.

To my lips come a sublime verse, a cry of regret, the cry of Ostasio de Polenta, after he has sold his sister to Gianciotto for the help of one hundred lancers: "We have sold her for the help of one hundred men! Isn't she perhaps worth the conquest of all Romagna?"

I did not sell Oretta, but I gave up an immense treasure that lies there, between the Alps and the sea —a treasure which I represent under the symbol of that fine Italian girl, but which is in reality the art, the grace, the joy, the light, the music of Italy!

My youthful dream of Florence serves to show how deeply the spell of the past acts upon me. I hold a similar experience for every period of our history, for every one of those silent towns of Italy that gather within their deserted squares the memories of our past glories.

I have no sympathy for the period of Italian life which extends from the middle of the sixteenth century to the middle of the eighteenth. Most of the Peninsula falls under the rule of the Spaniards, and their influence means corruption of character and of taste. The Catholic reaction, tardily organized to fight the Lutheran movement, takes in Italy the character of a jealous control over men's thoughts, hold-

ing them within the strict limits of dogma. The shadow of the Inquisition beclouds the Italian conscience, the arts decay, the memory of popular liberty fades, and Italy accepts, without fighting, the tyranny that Spain and the Church impose upon her.

During this period the Rome of the Popes rises to the topmost height of its splendor—gigantic palaces, Oriental obelisks, colossal churches, and a multitude of cupolas and belfries emerged above the roofs of the city.

It seems that Italian vitality, finding the avenues of thought closed, expands itself into the field of art with manifold violence—not the pure art of Bramante or Raphael, but an inordinate expression of extravagance, going beyond the limits of beauty. The new papal aristocracy has no equal for splendor, but lacks the civil wisdom of the old aristocracy of Venice or the rough manliness of our Piedmont barons. In the gay carnival of that time the Italian people forget the ideals of work and freedom. They would rather become servants to a prince than skillful workmen—a livery is better than the coat of the artisan, safer than the robe of the student. Why think? Above the thought is the Church, above the Church, Spain—above Spain, the Inquisitor!

Thinking is dangerous. Now and then the square of Campo dei Fiori offers the admonishing sight of some pale man in a black robe, dragged by the guards of the S. Ufficio to pay with his life the penalty for having used his brains. The sacred rights of reason

are stepped upon by the theocratic omnipotence of Rome. Giordano Bruno is burned at the stake, and the darkest tragedy of humanity takes place then. A glorious old man, Galileo, is thrown on his knees before the cardinals of the Holy Congregation and is forced, holding his hand on the sacred gospels, to deny the truth that he had conquered. Never before had human conscience stood such an affront!

But the Italian virtues, repressed by two hundred years of moral slavery, were not destroyed. Under the more enlightened rule of Austria and through the influence of the French writers, a new generation of men, towards the end of the eighteenth century, lays the foundation of modern Italian conscience. Systems of philosophy are created, jurisprudence is renewed upon principles of justice, the arts are led back to the ideals of classic beauty. The advent of the French Revolution brings the love for liberty. The Napoleonic era stirs the military spirit and the enthusiasm for glory. When, with the fall of Napoleon, the reactionary monarchies were reëstablished upon their thrones, the moral change of the Italians had been accomplished, the national spirit was born. Between 1815 and the middle of the century a great work of conspiracies undermines the foundations of tyrannic governments and the way is prepared for the revolution of the *Risorgimento* that is to set Italy free.

XI

TURIN

I HAVE drifted into this historical digression because it is well that I should recollect the developments of the civilization by which I have been so deeply affected. The centennial vicissitudes of a race reflect upon one's soul more, perhaps, than the events in which one has a personal part. I can trace many aspects of my character to causes that are remote from me by centuries. However, I do not want anyone to conceive the idea that my interest in the past should have at any time interfered with my interest in the present. Life was too sweet in my student days for me to miss any of it.

Turin is a delightful city. It lies at the foot of the hills, on either side of the river, with the great mountains within easy reach. In the spring the hills are our playground and in the summer we can find shelter from the heat in the fresh valleys of the Alps. Then we have a most pleasant social life. The city has been for centuries the seat of the House of Savoy and, though the court has been removed from there for over fifty years, the traditions of court life were still alive when I was a student. Two branches of the royal family made their home there and many social

entertainments were graced by the presence of princes and princesses. The Duke of Aosta and his two brothers, the Count of Turin and the Duke of Abruzzi, were very active leaders in sporting events. The racing season was most animated and our horse shows offered a brilliant sight, with the cavalry officers in their vivid uniforms. It was the period when four-in-hands were in great vogue, and after the races there was a gorgeous parade of tallyhos on the "Corso," between the double lines of chestnut trees. The scarlet liveries of the royal coaches made a striking note of color in the show. Each family of the nobility also had its four-in-hand with coachmen and postilions in great attire—silver braided coats, cocked hats, and trumpets.

When students, we had no end of amusements: fancy dress balls in the winter and in the spring boat races on the river and picnic parties on the hills. Our university has a real tradition of Bohemian life; students live outside of the college, and group according to their taste, or according to provinces, forming little households of three or four. Everybody's house is everyone else's—friends drift in and out. Parties are enlivened by the presence of charming little *midinettes,* artist's models, shop girls, *à la* Mimi, *à la* Musette. They are the joy of the students. In the spring they were the companions of our picnic parties out on the hills. By couples we used to start off, early Sunday mornings, bound for the hills to pick violets. Violets are plentiful there. In March and April they per-

fume the air—they grow on the slopes, on the embankments of the roads, in the green fields, under the trees in bloom. The girls loved them; they competed with one another as to who would pick the most. They adorned their corsages and made little garlands for their hair. All morning we loafed about in the grassy slopes, at noon we drew toward some *osteria.*

We knew the choice places and in each one we were on friendly terms with the proprietor, the cook, and the waitress. In most of them they had little blackboards in the kitchen, where they kept the names of the customers written in chalk, with the amounts overdue. My name always figured on half a dozen of those blackboards. We went in, saluted the crowd entered into the kitchen to see what was going on, and took possession of the place. The girls went for eggs out to the chicken house. We arranged the menu with the proprietor, choosing the wines, helping a hand in setting the table and in doing the cooking. After lunch somebody would start playing the piano, then we danced or played *boccie* in the yard, or we helped the girls in the swing under the pergola. It was genuine recreation, as it always is when boys and girls are out in the fine air of the spring scented with violets.

Towards evening every one was in love with the girl he was escorting. Sweet words were said coming down the dark road, arm in arm, while the city below and the plain became dotted with lights. It wasn't real love, I suppose, but it was as good as the real one, perhaps better, a pure form of sentimental languor which only youth can enjoy and which is indeed the

great privilege of youth. In later years, when for memory's sake, or under the spell of romantic circumstances, I have tried to renew those sensations, I found myself out of tune and ridiculous. The time was past—the imagination was gone—the spirit had vanished!

Often I look back to those days and get all wrapped in memories. I can hardly recall any one of those girls, but each one seems to merge into some feature of the landscape or some hour of the day, or season of the year. One makes me think of the vast plain where the river flows, one blazes in my memory like the glory of summer, one gives me the sensation of the dew at dawn. Of one I remember the step, of one the hand, of one the perfume, of one the flesh. All the stretch of those hills appears before me from Superga to Moncalieri, alive with visions. Then I see a park and a palace, and suddenly mid the tender green one radiant girl appears—Reginella d' Oro!

XII

REGINELLA D' ORO

I FIRST met Reginella one summer in the Piedmont Alps, where I was spending my vacation with a couple of friends in a little valley at the foot of the Matterhorn. We lived in a most primitive hut on the side of the mountain, about three miles from the village. This hut had been built during the course of the previous summer by a native who had picked the stones from the torrent, cut the lumber from the forest, and mixed the clay, doing it all with the help of his young son.

I call it a hut because I don't know of any other name by which to designate this small, rude dwelling; still the place was solid and comfortable and was as good to live in as any house I have ever known. It was built against the side of the mountain, and from the window we had a wide view of the valley, with the Matterhorn at the end. Directly below we could see the village, with its white steeple and its neat little houses grouped around the church on one side of the torrent.

About two hundred yards from the village there was a pink house which was occupied that summer by a family from town—an old gentleman with his wife

and two daughters. We had inquired several times about these people, without getting much information. I was anxious to meet them, as at times I felt somewhat lonely up in our retreat. My two friends were amateur artists and spent most of the day drawing and painting, but my only resources were reading and walking.

We had our meals in the house of the man who owned the hut. He lived a few hundred yards further up the mountain, by the side of a big rough stable where he kept his cows at night. His wife did the cooking for us. We had good but simple things—vegetables, chickens, honey, and cheese. About twice a week I went down to the village to buy meat or some other luxuries. In the course of one of those marketing expeditions I met Reginella.

She came walking across a meadow, alone, with her arms full of flowers. Tall and slender she appeared, all rosy in the light of the setting sun, her blonde hair somewhat blown by the wind. When she passed by me, I said, "How do you do?" following the informal custom of the place. Very pleasantly she retorted, "How do you do?" so that I felt encouraged to add a few more words and asked her what she thought of the valley, and how she liked the Matterhorn. The great big rock arose in front of us, clean cut against the sky, black between the shining glaciers that surround it. We turned our gaze at it in admiration. Wasn't the sight inspiring in the golden light of the evening? I thought it was a great treat to gaze at it every day, after the commonplace sights in town all

the year around. Then I went on to say that I spent most of my time in town, in Turin. I lived there. Did she come from Turin, too, perhaps? Yes, she did come from there. Well, probably she knew some of my friends. Did she know so and so? She knew so and so and other people, too, whom I knew. In a moment we found that we had a number of mutual acquaintances. When she mentioned her name, it turned out that her father had been my professor at college and had made me flunk twice at the examinations.

This fortunate circumstance made us feel as though we were not altogether strangers to each other. I asked permission to walk along for a while, which she granted. We turned back towards the village, she carrying her bunch of flowers, I with my package of chops. On the way she told me that she lived with her family in the pink house outside the village. Why! was that so? I had been weaving dreams about that house, gazing at it from our retreat, up on the side of the mountain. I lived up there—pointing my finger to the little bunch of huts high up in the distance—lived there with a couple of friends. She had heard about me, somebody had told her about the three young men living there in retreat like hermits. She thought we were artists. Wasn't it rather lonely there?

It was lonely! My friends were artists, not I. I felt the solitude more than they did, not having any particular thing to do all day long.

Then why did I choose such a solitary place to

spend my vacation? Ah, ah! She knew! Seeking balm for some heart trouble, or rest from too much gayety in town.

I made no direct answer, but looked into her eyes with a sibylline smile that, without confirming her surmises, gave her freedom to imagine anything she pleased on the subject. In fact, I tried to blend in my look a little expression of wickedness with a tinge of romantic melancholy and to end it with a twinkle, just to show how much I appreciated her interest in my personal affairs and how welcome any help from her would be to alleviate my loneliness.

We gazed at each other for a minute. The blue haze of the evening had fallen over the mountains—that soft mist that veils the Alpine landscape as the light of day fades in the sky. The whole valley was now in shadow, the great even shadow full of mystery and peace, so soothing to the hearts. On top of the Matterhorn the sun was still shining against the gray, glittering stone. The massive block seemed to stand alone, emerging from the mist like an immense temple under the purple sky. Small clouds, as light as veils, floated here and there above the mountains, lighted from underneath by the last rays of the setting sun.

The trail was deserted; nothing in the calm vesper time broke the spell of the hour and of the place. Now and then on the wind came the tinkle of the cowbells from the pastures and the noise of the waterfalls. We gazed at each other once more. What happened then? Not a word was said, not a move

made, no smile was exchanged—we simply stood silent for a moment. What passed through us, intangible, yet so strong that it left us changed, more human, closer to nature and to each other? "What a pity," I said, "that we have never met before!" She caught in my voice an undertone of regret for some lost happiness, of hope for some happiness to come.

We started walking together. As we drew towards the house, she asked me if I would come in and meet her family. I said I would prefer not just then, as I would feel somewhat embarrassed at meeting her father after the misunderstanding we had had about scientific matters. Instead, I would like to see her again that night, if she would allow me. There was a low barn behind her house. I would be waiting for her at nine o'clock in the space between the house and the barn, and she should surely come. No, she wouldn't come, she simply would not come! I would be there, anyhow. I hoped she would change her mind.

I spent the few hours before the appointed time in weaving plans, speculating on the development of events, strengthening my heart for the coming meeting. Why had I asked her? What was I going to say to her? What was I going to do? I had no definite idea, still I wanted so much to see her again soon. I knew that something would surely happen. Would she come? Would she find a way to leave the house? Hundreds of questions, hundreds of thoughts drifted through my mind. The package of chops bothered me somewhat. I didn't know what to do with it, so

I hid it under a stone, thinking to pick it up later on my way home.

When the appointed time approached, I was at the rendezvous half an hour ahead. The coast was clear, the narrow space between the barn and the house as dark as pitch—just the spot for a secret meeting. Under the cover of the projecting roof of the barn I stood and waited.

After a while a man came out of the house and started pacing back and forth in the open space in front. He smoked a pipe. A little dog followed him in his walk, running about and sniffing curiously. In the uncertain glimmer of the starry night I thought I recognized her father, the professor who had made me flunk twice. Confound it! Confound it! Suddenly I was startled, a chill ran down my back, for the dog was coming my way. Protected by the projecting roof, I stood still against the wall of the barn, holding my breath—stiff with fear. The dog approached—he saw me—he stopped, surprised, uneasy. I could hear my heart beat, but I didn't move. What a predicament, my Lord! The dog came cautiously toward me. Any moment I expected him to bark, so I made ready to take to my heels. He started smelling my shoes, smelling my legs, rubbing his nose against my trousers, puzzled, nervous. He ran back to his master, then back to me three or four times, agitated. He was a puppy. I didn't dare to kick him, as I was afraid he would squeal, yet I had to get rid of him some way before his master grew suspicious.

Not to hurt him, but just to give him a hint to get out, I ventured a little kick. He seized my foot with his teeth, gnawed my shoe, jumped about playfully, coming back to chew my trousers, hugely amused at the game. Confounded animal! I felt lost. All at once the man stopped his walk, looked around for the dog and called him back with a whistle, then returned to the house and closed the door behind him. All became quiet again.

Praise be to God! I crossed myself. I waited a few minutes longer. Not a sound, not a light to be seen. In the peaceful silence I waited. Finally the door of the house opened again and somebody came out. It was she. The little dog was with her. She walked across to a rustic well at the side of the barn, carrying a pail, which she lowered into the well and filled with water.

From my recess I tried to give signs of my presence. I coughed and stamped my foot. She didn't seem to notice, but turned back towards the house. Then I ventured a little whistling call. The little dog ran to me. This time I didn't chase him away. I petted him and snapped my fingers at him. He ran about playfully, much pleased.

She stopped. I called softly, "Reginella, Reginella!" For a minute she stood still, undecided, then she walked towards me, carrying the pail of water.

"Why did you come? Didn't I tell you not to? Oh my! oh my! At this time of night, too! Oh go home; go home; for pity's sake, before anybody

catches you about! How will you ever get back home to-night? How will you find the trail in the dark?"

I did not care for the trail; I did not care for home. I wanted to see her. Wasn't she happy I had come?

"Happy? Why?"

To that I made no reply. I took hold of her arm and tried to look into her eyes, calling softly, "Reginella! Reginella!" She was holding on to her pail. I passed my arm around her waist and brought my lips against hers. She tried to free herself, wriggling like a snake. In the struggle the pail fell to the ground, flooding our feet. The dog, frightened, burst into a bark. A voice from the house called, "Reginella!" She broke loose from my grasp and, picking up the pail, darted away. All was silent for a minute. The dog had followed her. She had shut the door. What a failure! Good Lord, what a failure!

I walked stealthily around the corner of the house. The ground floor windows were lighted. I tried to get a peep inside. There she was, sitting by the table, knitting a sock, all intent on her work apparently, and saying a word now and then to her mother, as though nothing had happened. What an actress! I couldn't restrain a slight smile. In spite of my disappointment over the abrupt interruption of our meeting, I was pleased that the turn of events had drawn her into playing the comedy for my sake. There is no better way of attaching people to each other than complicity in guilt.

The night was dark when I started on my way back

—starry but no moon—how could I ever find my way?

When I got to the bridge across the torrent I found that the chops were gone. Probably the water had washed them away, or a passing dog had discovered them. How could I explain to my friends the next day? Well, in some way or other! The main thing was to get home. When finally I reached the beginning of the trail I was much relieved. Still, it was a long and difficult way through the woods and along deep ravines. Over and over again I lost my way, never reaching home until very late in the night.

The next day, of course, I had to give an account of myself and explain why I had come back without the chops. It was not long before my friends found out the truth, or at least part of it. They had well imagined that the pink house had something to do with my delay. Well! how were the girls? Some day couldn't they come down to the valley with me to meet them, or would I bring the girls up to have a picnic? I told them that I had met only one and I had better make sure about the other before arranging anything definite. I returned to the village that same day, for I was anxious to see Reginella and find out how she felt towards me.

When I reached the valley that afternoon I roamed around the house for a long while, but she was nowhere to be seen. This disappointment was repeated on the next three days. Once I caught sight of her at a window of her house, but she saw me and withdrew. It was very discouraging. I wanted to see her

and speak to her at all costs. Why should she be so cruel and make me so unhappy? It occurred to me that she might be at the post office when the stage arrived with the morning mail. Acting on that idea, I went down and there she was. When she saw me she turned her face away, and pretended to be reading the time table on the wall. The place was filled with people, waiting for their mail. I thought that as long as there was a storm coming, I might as well face it there, where fear of scandal would prevent her from going to extremes. I walked straight to her through the crowd and, taking off my hat, said, "How do you do?"

She answered, "How do you do," in a tone and with a glance that conveyed great disgust at the sight of me. Then she turned again to the study of the time table. There was only one stage a day doing service, and she knew well the time of its arrival and its departure; still, it took her five minutes to get this information. During that time I stood in watchful waiting. When the postmaster called her name, I took her mail and passed it over to her. She thanked me and walked out. I followed, and when we got around the corner of the post house, I called, "Reginella!" She stopped and gave me another look of contempt and wrath.

Why? What had come over her? Didn't she want ever to speak to me again? Had I done anything to offend her?

Done anything to offend her? She admired my nerve! No, she did not want to speak to me or see

me again. At this she started off once more. I called again, "Reginella, please listen to me. I meant nothing wrong, let me talk to you, I want to explain."

No, she wanted no explanation, she was through, and regretted she had ever let me speak to her. She would never have done so, but for the fact that she thought I was a gentleman.

Well! She had no right to be so angry, she had no right to think I was not a gentleman. As a matter of fact it wasn't my fault if my lips had touched hers in the dark. I had lost my balance. I had tripped over the dog.

She retorted, "Tripped over the dog, indeed! Tripped over the dog!" and turned her indignant face towards me with a sarcastic smile that showed the white range of her beautiful teeth. (I felt like tripping over the dog again!) In her eyes, though, under the expression of disdain I caught a hidden sign of merriment at my bold lie, an evident desire to break into a laugh. I didn't miss the chance, so said:

"Come on, Reginella, don't be cruel, have pity on me! Why should we quarrel and waste this short time that we can have together? I have sought you for three days. I have wanted to be with you ever since we met. I will be gone from here in a week. Let us not lose this opportunity. Where shall we find again a place like this? Look!" With my outstretched arm I pointed to the valley. In the glory of the midday the pastures had the brightness of live emerald, the torrent was all silver, the range of peaks lined against the sky shone with all the re-

flection of the stone and the ice under the flaming sun. Above all, at the end of the valley, the Matterhorn towered her gigantic height. Not a cloud in the sky, not a breath of wind! Reginella's eyes followed my arm and she gazed in silence. My appeal to nature, to the eternal ally of youth and love, won her back to me. When she turned her face again a smile was in her eyes. I took her by the hand and said, "To-night at nine o'clock I will be there!"

That night, instead of standing by the barn, I kept at a safe distance, waiting for her father to come out as usual and have his walk. After I saw him return to the house, I went straight to the place of meeting and waited for her to appear.

During the afternoon I had bought some biscuits for the dog. My first thought really had been to buy poison for him, on account of the scare he had given me the first time. But I was afraid of displeasing Reginella. And then I had taken a sort of fancy to the little creature. When she came she had him with her. He greeted me by wagging his tail and licking my hand. I handed him some biscuits. Reginella was pleased at my tender thought for her pet and told me his name. It was Pilin, the same as that of the dog we had when I was a child in Villanova. Wasn't that a lucky coincidence?

There was nearby a rustic bench. There she sat by me with Pilin in her lap. After a few words she said, with some embarrassment, "Promise me you are not going to behave as you did last time!" With-

out committing myself I answered evasively, meanwhile petting Pilin and handing him a biscuit. While passing my hand over the back of the dog I met hers and held it.

It was a clear night. The first quarter of the moon hung like a silver sickle in the sky, throwing an uncertain light over the mountains. In the still air the glaciers glimmered with reflections of steel and glass. From the woods came the scent of the pines, from the rocks the noise of the waterfalls.

I breathed softly, "Reginella! Reginella!" What tune was there in my voice? What secret tune that made it a call and a prayer and a soft suasion? Under the strength of the appeal, nothing but her name, she trembled and her head fell on my shoulder with a deep abandon. Not a word she answered, not a sound. Bending over her I could hear the soft music of her breathing, the beating of her heart, almost the tacit flow of the blood in her veins. How long did that ecstasy last? By that obscure barn, on the rustic bench, we let the time glide by. We let the eternal beat of time fall in tune with the beat of our hearts.

All was quiet, the house was silent. Pilin had gone to sleep. In the dark I felt a tear drop on my hand—Reginella was crying. I softly called, "Reginella!" and lifting up her head I held her chin in my hands. Her eyes were full of tears. In the dim light of the moon I saw on her face the signs of a great emotion, of the great fatigue of love. I said slowly, "Well? Well? Well?" A smile lit her eyes through the tears. Placing my hands on both sides of her

cheeks, I slowly drew her head towards me. She was without will, as in a dream. I brought her mouth to my lips, and without a word she gave me the gift of a kiss. Her face was pale, her hair, under the light of the moon, was silk and gold. Rising slowly, she picked up Pilin asleep and walked back towards the house.

For two weeks the valley was our playground of love. For two weeks I met her every day, every hour in the day. In the fresh light of morning she walked to me across the fields of vivid grass and flowers. She had the grace of a Greek virgin when she waved her hand to greet me. The wind blew her light dress against her body; her youthful form appeared like the immortal figure of Niké on the marble bow. At sunset, under the purple reflections of the sky, her eyes assumed the deep color of violets, while she looked at me with her silent gaze. At times, with a bold movement, she loosened her hair to the wind, like a stream of burnished gold. By day she was fiery and passionate, but at night in the moonlight she was weak, tender, submissive. One word of mine would make her eyes fill with tears, would make her tremble, humble like a slave!

She was silent at times; at times she spoke softly to me, said things that I had never heard before, have never heard since, never expect to hear again. Just a word now and then, a murmur, an appeal, a sigh; my name alone, after a long silence, followed by a long silence.

Reginella bent under the spell of love as the reed bends under the wind. Not the spell of love alone had control of her, had control of us, but the place, the time, and the holy spirit of youth. We were not masters of ourselves, we were entirely at the mercy of majestic Nature about us. Every one of those peaks, every one of those crags, every turn of the valley, the sky, the waters, the desolate immensity of the glaciers, had a voice for us, a call and a suasion of love. Under the midday sun they awoke in our hearts an unbounded joy, an immense desire for each other, and a wider sensation of life; at dusk a serene feeling of peace and contentment, at night a vague forgetfulness of our own selves, almost a wish to disappear in the mute light of the moon.

One day I took her up to see my friends. They were sketching in a pasture up on the mountain. When we got there I said to them, "Here she is, Reginella." They greeted her with great cordiality, though somewhat confused at the sight of so fine a girl in their retreat.

Perfectly easy and natural, she told them to keep on with their work. She sat down on the grass by them, interested, keeping her eyes on their work, then lifting them up to the landscape, observing, comparing, volunteering remarks, praising, enraptured at the beauty of the scenery, amused like a child. I had never seen her so animated. She chatted and laughed; at one of my friend's questions as to whether she painted, she answered, "I don't paint, I sing." Then she got up and sang—an old Piedmontese song that

we all knew. Her voice was clear and fine; we made her sing again and joined in the refrain. Afterward she walked with me to the house where we lived, longing to glance through the window. Then she ran down the trail towards home, frightened to death lest her family should find out about her escapade.

Running at her side, I went along too, holding her by the arm and stealing a kiss now and then while I helped her over the rocks. "Go away! Go away!" she cried out laughingly, and pushed me off, in her haste to get home.

The next day with my friends I left the valley and went back to town. When I saw the village disappearing from sight I stopped the stage, to give one more look at the pink house. A light column of smoke went up from the chimney. The great mountains surged on all sides. At the end of the valley, above all stood the Matterhorn—immense, sacred, fascinating!

A shiver ran through me. I gazed once more at the house, once more at the mountain. Under its great shadow our love had been born. It was associated with all the dreams of those happy days and it would forever be linked in my heart with the memory of Reginella.

Ten years have gone. I pass at times a place on Fifth Avenue where there is a picture of the Matterhorn displayed, and every time I see it I have an apparition of Reginella. I walk ten or fifteen blocks amid the noise and the bustle of the street, seeing

nothing before me but her. Other girls go by, real ones, but I hardly notice them, for my mind is occupied with that vision of times gone by, so far off, so dim, that I have to strain my memory to retrace the beloved outlines of her fading shadow.

I did not see much of Reginella during the following fall and winter. We met, to be sure, at a number of dances and parties, but with little chance of being alone together as we desired. Only now and then we exchanged a kiss, with great fear lest we should be caught.

According to the detestable European fashion of the time (things have changed since) she could hardly go out unchaperoned. I would meet her at times, on her way to a school where she went to take music lessons. But I could only stop her for a few minutes and stand in a respectful attitude, hat in hand, to talk to her. This state of affairs was highly unsatisfactory to us. The memory of our great joy and freedom out in the mountains made it hard for us to endure these cruel limitations. So the winter went by, but our love didn't decrease. In fact it was strengthened by this continuous need of restraint.

The spring brought a great change in the conditions. For several years I had been in the habit of spending the few months that preceded my examinations in a little house on the hills near the city. This house was connected with an institution for the education of girls, called the Villa della Regina. The

Queen of Italy had donated this villa for the care of young daughters of military officers who had died in service.

It was a large palace of the eighteenth century, built by Juvara, the famous architect of the court of Vittorio Amedeo II. It stood on the side of the hill and had a magnificent view of the city of Turin and of the plain of Piedmont, with the mountains appearing in the far distance. Back of the palace a beautiful park covered a large part of the hill. Old trees, mossy fountains, long alleys lined with marble statues, vestiges all over of the royal splendor of ancient days gave a tone of most dignified magnificence to the place, an atmosphere of grandeur and nobility. The slight abandon and decay gave the park a resemblance to some of the old Roman villas.

From the gates a double staircase wound up in an ample circle to the front of the villa, enclosing a large fountain on the lower ground. The sides of the staircase were covered with moss and ivy and in the spring hung thick with great bunches of wistaria. The little house I spoke of was built just outside the gates. I found there much better chances for concentrating on my studies, and I liked the lovely spots, which were so particularly beautiful during the spring and early summer.

About two hundred girls ranging from eleven to seventeen in age, lived in the villa. When they went out for their daily walk they passed under my window. They wore a uniform with blue ribbons and a blue veil around the hat. Occasionally I had met some of

them and I have recollections of furtive smiles from under those blue veils.

That spring I moved to the house on the hill earlier than usual. After the morning lessons at the university, I often walked over to the place and spent the afternoon there with my books. For five hours, from one to six, I was busy with the most complicated problems of mathematics and mechanics. At six o'clock I left my books and came out to wait for Reginella.

From the house a straight alley of linden trees led down to the bridge over the Po, beyond which was the large Piazza Vittorio Emanuele. I could see Reginella from the doorstep of my house cross the piazza half a mile below, and then walk towards the bridge. I could recognize her from her way of walking when she appeared between the arcades at the end of the piazza. At times our friend Pilin was with her, looking like a little movable black spot.

She walked slowly with a certain poise and a grace all her own. The little black figure advanced in the great square inundated by the rosy light of the sunset. I did not go down to meet her; in fact as she approached I withdrew around the corner of the house. She would glance right and left, to make sure that nobody was in sight, then together we slipped through the gate into the park, disappearing under the green. This furtive trick made her heart beat fast, and always flushed her face. It was like catching a frightened bird in my hand when I drew her to

me, as soon as we got under the protecting shade of the trees.

At that time of the day the park was deserted, for the girls dined between six and seven in the refectory back of the place. Through the alleys lined with huge old trees we walked, hand in hand, over the green grass between the vines in bloom and the edges of boxwood. The sunlight flowed on the gravel path through the trees—that blond sunlight of May, soft and tender. We walked together, wrapped in the holy spirit of the spring, through that old park that had seen the loves of the princesses of Savoy.

Everything in the place spelled past grandeur and dignity. Now and then the great palace appeared on the side of the hill bathed in the light of the sunset. Now and then through the foliage a classic statue of Diana, or of Venus, stood gleaming white in her mysterious stillness. We had a splendid view of the plain below from a terrace at the far end of the park.

Many a time we stood on that terrace to watch the fall of day over the vast extent of meadows and fields that stretched from the slopes of the mountains at the horizon to the foot of the hills where we stood. The sky in the west back of the great barrier of mountains was flaming red, but the plain was immersed in the haze of evening, like a still sea, an immense sea without waves. Farms, towns, and villages emerged like islands with their towers and belfries; the rivers wound their way lazily across the fields, through groves of oaks and poplars. The city of

Turin lay at the foot of the hill, on either side of the river, lay tranquil and full of peace, with its red shingled roofs, its straight streets, and the hundred steeples of its churches. This was the town in which we both were born. What dreams we wove about it, while gazing down with eyes veiled by the languid haze of love! Dreams of happy days to come, of life side by side in serene communion.

Around the terrace, and below, a number of fruit trees covered the hill. In the spring they were clothed with clouds of pink and white blossoms; later, in the summer, they bore a great quantity of apples, pears, and peaches. Reginella was fond of picking the fruit from the branches and of biting into them with her white, shining teeth. We used to walk around the orchard to find the best, the ripest ones. She stretched her arms up to reach for them and her sleeves would glide down, disclosing her white arm and her elbows with the two pink dimples.

At times I had to lift her up so she could reach the fruit. Her young fresh body trembled in my hands in her effort. "Higher! Higher!" she would say, laughing with the clear gay laughter of the child who gets the coveted prize. Then she would slip from me, bite into the fruit, and offer me her mouth, all dewy with the fresh pulp. I took her into my arms and kissed her.

A great joy, an unbounded mirth filled our young hearts in that noble old park where, in days past, kings and princesses had lived. I used to tell her of the girls of Savoy, of Clotilda, the blonde bride

of Carlo Emanuele, of Maria Ferdinanda, the princess of the blue eyes, the tender lover of Vittorio Amedeo. Some vestiges were left of those past loves. In one remote corner of the park a small marble pavilion stood covered with vines and moss, probably a refuge of royal young couples, in the spring days of long ago.

In the thickest part of the woods a marble basin held the clear waters of a tiny spring, and light weeds, water lilies and nymphæas of all sorts, a still, peaceful vegetation, floated on the surface. A marble statue, knocked from its pedestal, lay half emerging from the water.

It must have lain thus for centuries in that bed of weeds and lilies, nude and beautiful, nymph or goddess, that pure form that some unknown artist had struck from the white block. The lower part of the body was hardly visible through the green veil of weeds and leaves, but the forehead and the two breasts and the emerging part of the trunk, washed by the rains of centuries, had acquired the marvelous whiteness of live flowers. We would sit for hours by the basin, watching the white form in its stillness. From that nude marble we got the conception in our hearts of the divine essence of young human beauty. The figure, still and lifeless, held us under the spell of the ideal. There was Reginella beside me alive and young, but we forgot our youth and we forgot our love in gazing at that dumb stone, cut by some unknown man with his chisel in centuries past.

We forgot our love, but our love grew in that mute contemplation. It fortified itself, nourished by the sublime spirit of art and purity. Not an impure thought ever went through our minds; never, in lifting our eyes from the nude form and looking at each other, did we flush for any secret desire. I had at times—in fact many times—caught Reginella in my arms and kissed her, holding her in close embrace. I had done it in the glaring light of the sun, sure and joyful, and in the still moonlight of the mountains, with romantic languor. I never did it there. Some inward sentiment made it impossible for me to hold her in my arms in the presence of that nude form lying still, with the two breasts raising themselves out of the water like flowers.

One May night—the moon was full in the sky—I stood long by the window of my room, the image of Reginella haunting my mind. An immense desire to hold her in my arms filled my whole being. The night was calm, a fragrance of roses came from the gardens of the villa, and a song of invisible nightingales from the woods. In the moonlight stood the great palace of the Queen and the park of our love; down below was the immense plain, mysterious and fantastic.

I ran my eye over the plain, over the city, to the house in which she was maybe awake, maybe desiring me. Long I stood gazing through the night, almost hoping against hope that some miracle would happen, that she would suddenly appear. I walked

down. The gate of the park was closed, so I climbed over the wall. Through the dark woods I went till I reached the basin where the statue lay. All was silent and still, but for the calls of the nightingales. I stopped, looking around like a thief, afraid of being caught; then I knelt on the edge of the basin, and with my lips touched the forehead of the statue!

Ten years have passed and in my memory the outlines of Reginella's face have grown pale and hazy. But the statue, in her immobility of centuries, is still vivid, white, under the silvery light of the moon, the youthful breasts emerging from the water. Reginella will grow old, and I may face her some day, pale and gray, pale and gray myself. The statue, in the remote corner of the park, the symbol that I kissed in an hour of great youthful passion, will lie unchanged in her sleep and carry, way beyond our mortal love, her imperishable beauty!

In that same place, that park of the Villa della Regina, I saw Reginella for the last time, when she came to say good-by to me before I left for America. It was in the spring of the following year. I had finished college in the fall, and, after a few months of uncertainty about my future career, I had decided to join my brother Vittore in the United States and go into business with him. A few years my senior, he had come over soon after leaving the university, driven by a natural spirit of adventure and inde-

pendence, and in the course of a comparatively short time had established and successfully developed a good business enterprise.

Strong in character, bright and active, he had had, ever since my tender youth, a great influence over me. When he came back to Italy the first time, after three years' absence, he spoke to me about this great land of opportunity, inviting me to join him. A younger brother of mine, Beniamino, had come over six months before, upon his advice, and was most pleased and hopeful. So he was writing me, urging me to come.

For a time I was greatly undecided. The idea of seeing new lands and meeting new people rather appealed to me. The thought, too, that I would find here a wide field for my career and could make myself useful to my brothers was a strong inducement. Still, I was so deeply attached to my home and my land that I could hardly face the prospect of leaving them. I had never been away from home for any length of time and every memory of my past was connected with that corner of Italy, every dream for the future had for setting that green plain encircled by the wall of the Alps. Within that wall was my world. If I lifted my eyes, north, west, south, that familiar succession of crests outlined itself against the sky and closed my view within its inner circle. What was beyond it? What was across the sea? Would I ever find there the peace of mind, the simple satisfaction of life that every man gets in his native land? I could not imagine myself liv-

ing away from home and being happy. And then, what about Reginella?

At the thought of her, at the thought of losing her, all rosy dreams of success faded in my mind, and the picture of a future far from her presented itself to me in all its loneliness and squalor. For two years I had grown so near to her, I felt so much the need of seeing her at all times, of knowing that she was mine, that life without her seemed to me unbearable. Still, our relation couldn't keep on forever the present way. I couldn't marry her, without first having well set the foundations of my career. At that time I had very little idea of what chances I would have in Italy. Should I miss the opportunity that was offered me from my brother? After long hesitation, I made up my mind to come over.

I had vaguely mentioned several times to Reginella my idea of leaving Turin, but it was such an indefinite plan that we both had attached little importance to it. When I finally told her my decision, saying, "Reginella, I have decided to go to America," she lifted her eyes and replied, "To America! What do you mean, Carletto?" She had practically forgotten my mention of the plan some time before. "I mean to America," I said, "to New York."

The news seemed to strike her more with surprise than with pain. Still, she turned pale.

"To New York? And what for?"

"Well, for my career."

She couldn't understand why I should need to go to New York for my career. She thought there would

be plenty of chances for me right in Turin. Still, she didn't try to divert me from my decision. During the few weeks that preceded my departure, we never made any reference to the future, or spoke of how we would part and for how long. By the changed expression of her eyes, however, and by the deeper lines in her forehead I could see how much worry was in her soul.

Two months went by, during which I was busy with my preparations. During this period I saw her from time to time, and we exchanged some correspondence. As the day of the departure drew nearer, she seemed to grow more silent and overcome by the burden of her great grief, but I never saw her cry nor saw in her eyes traces of tears. The day before I left she came to say good-by to me at the Villa della Regina.

It was the end of March, one clear day of spring, as mild and soft as ever the town of Turin had seen. The hills had the fresh semblance of the landscapes that the primitive artists painted back of their Madonnas, outlines of green against the blue sky, slender trees, silver brooks, and here and there pink and white clouds of blossoms. The park of the Villa della Regina was at its best, magnificent in its glory of blossoms and fresh verdure, fragrant with violets everywhere. The great palace, against the blue sky, rose on the side of the hill like a house of dreams. Dreams of marvelous love and wonderful luxuries, and long idle hours I imagined, while, absorbed in its contemplation, I waited for Reginella.

As the girls were away on their Easter vacations,

the great house was closed, mute, mysterious, and fascinating. Behind those green shutters, in those magnificent halls, contented love would have made of a man more than a mortal, new joys would have been revealed to him, unknown sides of life. "Reginella! Reginella!" By calling her name aloud in the silence of that deserted place, I could almost evoke her figure and see her, a live, marvelous form of love, moving under the gilded ceilings, among the frescoed walls, by the mirrors that had once reflected the delicate features of the princesses of Savoy. Her name sounded with a new significance to my ears, for that day was going to be the last of our love. Absorbed in the contemplation of the great palace and of my own dreams, I did not see her coming up the hill, I did not see her until she appeared at the gate of the park, behind the railing. She wore a white dress, and her face was pale.

As I came down the stairway to meet her she waved her hand at me and smiled. Many a sad smile I had seen before in my life, many I have seen since, but none as sad as that with which she greeted me! I caught hold of her hand and said: "Reginella! We have the whole place to ourselves to-day, the girls are away, we will go all over the park for the last time. How late can you stay?" She looked at me and shrugged her shoulders with another faint smile. How late? What difference would it make? As late as I wanted. She didn't seem to care about what would happen at home if she stayed out longer than

usual. Generally when we met she made me promise that I would let her go home by a certain time, surely. This time she seemed indifferent. She seemed indifferent when, passing my arm through hers, I led her up the staircase. She leaned upon me with more weight than I ever realized she could weigh. She breathed heavily going up the steps, those same steps that she had so often run up ahead of me, trying to escape my grasp while hurrying to hide under the protecting shelter of the trees.

I asked her, "Are you not feeling well, Reginella?" She lifted up her eyes and said, "Why? do I look ill?" She did look ill. She looked as though she had shed many tears, though her eyes were dry now. She was haggard and feverish.

"You are pale," I said. "Let us sit here." We were just at the top of the staircase, where the two semicircular flights met in a landing, making a small terrace above the gate. I took hold of her and lifted her to a seat on the balustrade. Standing by her, my two hands on the marble ledge, one on each side of her, I looked into her face.

We didn't speak, as we felt that there was nothing to be said. I followed in her eyes the drift of her thoughts. I had no thoughts of my own, absorbed in the silent tragedy reflected in those listless eyes. She lifted her hands to my head, passed them over my face, over my cheeks, under my chin, on my lips, as though she were trying to get the impression of my features on her fingers and keep the memory of that feeling. Holding my face between her palms,

she put her thumbs on my eyelids and pushed them up with a gentle pressure to look into my eyes, then, rocking my head back and forth, she pulled it to her shoulders against her cheek. I closed my arms around her. Leaning over her, I could feel against my side the soft beat of her heart. Through the haze of her golden hair I could see, as far back as my eye could reach, the plain—the plain of Piedmont, and the city and the river, the town, the mountains far away, the familiar land that I was going to leave on the morrow.

For a moment the beautiful view, in its marvelous mantle of spring, seen through the veil of her hair, caught all of my mind, all my imagination. Under the declining sun the whole country was golden and blue, alive with memories of joys and sorrows and glories. My eyes followed the straight lines of the roads through the plain, each leading to a village, to a farm, to a chapel in the fields, caught sight of the many signs of life in the country, just waking to the new activities of the spring, a team of white oxen plowing a field, a flock of grazing sheep, a boy leading a cow to a stream, a long line of birds flying through the sky. I had no power to concentrate; my eye drifted from one to the other of those sights that had been so familiar to me, that seemed that day so new and different. My mind had almost wandered, like my eyes, away from Reginella, though she was in my arms, bent over me, her soft cheek against mine.

But when I caught sight of the Matterhorn, just visible, mid the mass of mountains in the north, a sud-

den vision of her came to me, as she had appeared for the first time, walking across the meadow alone, her arms full of flowers, tall and slender, her blond hair somewhat blown by the wind, all rosy in the light of the setting sun. And a desire rose in my heart for that pure virgin smile which in the clear day of summer had revealed to me the great secret of happiness, and which for two years, the twenty-second and third of my life, had been the light of my soul. If I could once more see that smile in her eyes, and carry the memory of it with me for the sad days of the future! If once more I could hear from her the cry of joy that used to set my blood leaping, could catch a vision of white teeth, gleaming under the deep blue of her eyes!

I loosened my arms and drew back to look at her face. Before me I saw the shadow of the girl I had loved! The vague images of our happy life, of our love, of our joy, fell from my heart, as dead things at the sight of her sitting on the marble ledge, pale, mute, her head bent toward the ground. A vision of death rose before my eyes. She looked at me, at the palace, and at the woods, whence came the first song of the nightingale. She seemed to say in her mute reproach: "In this place that we loved, in these woods that guard the memory of our joy, by this palace of our dreams, under the green foliage, will you lay me dead with our dead love? Will you lay me alongside of our marble friend, the unknown goddess that has slept for centuries, whose white arms are lost that once embraced her lover? Will

you fold my arms that will never embrace you again?

Back of her the sky was growing purple. Red lights, through the clouds, cast a tragic note over the mountains. Alone, the great cone of the Monviso glimmered in the west like an immense torch. And the sight of this pale girl, a shadow of the one whom I had known and loved, the sight of the sunset back of her, our last sunset, gave me the sad admonition that every man gets who breaks his life for the sake of bettering it, who thinks he can get more of the future by throwing away the best of his past:

"Go, start building again the edifice of happiness that you are shattering now, you will find the way arid and the task long. Every step will be a pain that leads you away from yourself and from the things that were once your joy! You will have to build yourself a new soul, new desires, new ideas, before you enjoy the new people and their ways. You will have to forget the names of your friends and learn new names, you will be a stranger to all, despised by many, loved by none! And you will often gaze idly into space and find the space empty, because your mind will not get impressions from outside, but will follow the inner struggle of your two souls, the old one and the new, the one that knew joys and sorrows, that sank deep, that soared high, under the vivid and multiform sensations of youth, the new that will lead you away from yourself day by day, without your knowledge, against your will, and will make of you a stranger to yourself. Not such

a stranger, though, but that now and then the vision of this place and of this girl will come upon you and make you forget whatever joy your new life may offer you for a sad insane desire for these lost joys!"

And Reginella was before me, pale, silent, her head bent towards the ground! What was going through her mind? What vision of future disconsolate days was she contemplating? Why didn't we say one word to each other, why did we let the minutes go by, the last short time of our life in common? What cruel force sealed our lips to the expression of tenderness which could have sweetened the bitterness of the parting? We were indeed afraid of breaking the flimsy structure of our silence, as we knew that this was the crucial hour of our lives, and the forces that had our wills under their influence were of such a nature that no shallow word from one to the other could have interfered with their work. One sole word need have been said—no other—the word that would have been a promise and an obligation, that would have bound us from land to land across the ocean, until the day that a new word and a rite would bind us for life.

That word I did not say. That word she did not solicit. Was it strength or weakness, spirit of sacrifice or cowardice that held me from saying it? Many a time I have put that question to myself, and many a time I have come to the conclusion that it was plain cowardice, lack of confidence in my own will and my own mind, that prevented me from taking her in

my arms that day and telling her, "Reginella, if you will wait for me, I will come as soon as I feel reasonably safe to ask you to share my life."

Still at times I feel—and I have an idea that I did then act under the influence of this feeling—that more noble reasons than the desire to keep my freedom held my lips sealed. I loved Reginella sincerely, and the idea of breaking away from her, without leaving the way open to a reunion, was almost unbearable to me. But I was going out on an unknown venture, where I might succeed or fail, one that might require years of struggle and drive me into a life altogether different from any that I could imagine. Was I so sure of myself that I should take the responsibility of tying her up to any agreement which might eventually become impossible for me to carry out? Did I know the strength of our love? What test had it undergone which would give me a reasonable guarantee that it would not fade, that it would not be weakened and eventually be supplanted by some new passion? What did we know about our love, anyhow? What was it? It was born under the spell of the most romantic circumstances, when her picturesque figure had appeared to me, like the embodiment of a long cherished dream. Was it she, or the setting of which she was the center, or my own desire that had won me?

If it was she, wasn't it her bodily presence that held me to her? Was there any real spirituality in my passion or was it just a plain and most natural desire for her tenderness? What did we know of the

secret ways of nature, of the mysterious force that tied one to the other? If it was a desire and not a flame that burned in my heart, wouldn't the desire subside and die off, if its object be removed?

And then, again, did I have any right to let my own sentiments (or caprice) interfere with a future that I owed not only to myself but also to those who had helped me and were helping me to conquer it? I was going to contract a moral obligation by accepting the proposition of my brother Vittore. This obligation should take all precedence. Not until I was satisfied that, by linking my future to hers, I would not interfere with the discharge of my duties, could I ask Reginella to be mine. In the doubt that the events would prevent me from doing it, or would change my intentions, I had no right to ask her to wait for me.

There was one strong and more hidden reason that prevented me from saying to Reginella the words that would have made her mine for the future. It was a strange, curious notion that lies deep at the bottom of the soul of everyone who is born and brought up under the influence of the Catholic religion in Italy—the notion that the acceptance of joy and love is a sort of a sinful weakness, that the improvement of character and the elevation of spirit lie in sacrifice and abnegation. It is a remnant of the spirit that in the dark ages some obscure monk from the Orient brought to and spread over Italy, the spirit of self-denial and self-mortification. Was it not that spirit that made me feel a sort of bitter

pleasure in destroying my own love, of my own will, that made me proud of my character for sacrificing what was my greatest joy to an idea of superior duty? This perverted notion made me strong enough to face the poor girl without making a move to succor her distress. My lips were sealed, my eyes cruel. In looking at each other, we felt that our love was broken forever.

A noise at the end of the gravel path aroused our attention. Pauline, the little daughter of the gardener, appeared holding in her hand a branch of peach blossoms. In her childish gayety she ran to Reginella. She knew her, for at times in our walks through the park she used to accompany us.

She presented the branch to her and took her by the hand. "Signorina," she said, "come and see the new peach trees, they have bloomed this morning." Beyond the park wall, in a nook of the hill, the gardener had a little peach orchard of about twenty or twenty-five trees. I lifted Reginella down from the ledge and we followed Pauline. The trees, just come into bloom, were young and frail, waving in the gentle breeze of the evening. Over the new grass, Reginella and I, hand in hand, walked through the orchard. The light in the sky developed a flesh tinge from the blossoms and gave a golden tone to the hair of Reginella. A light breeze moved the tiny branches, blew her golden hair, drew a murmur from the boxwood edges. The great violet shadows of the mountains had covered all the plain now.

The whole plain was immersed in the deep peace of the early evening.

All was calm. But suddenly, from the hills above, the bells of San Vito rang the Ave Maria, then the bells of San Mauro, the bells of Santa Margherita. From the hills, from the villages far out in the plain, from the churches of the city, a wave of golden tunes brought us the mystic salute of the evening. The little girl had gone. We were alone again. The emotion of the hour once more became strong, almost unbearable to us. Reginella, in that fairy light amid the clouds of blossoms, appeared like a vision of sorrow. She lifted her hand to her pale forehead and crossed herself and I saw a slight movement of her lips. What was her secret prayer? A tear dropped from her eye and rolled down her cheek. A sudden impulse of pity drew me to her: "Reginella, Reginella, don't cry! You must not cry!"

She said, "You are going away!"

I replied: "I don't want you to be unhappy. I don't want you to cry. I want you to promise me that you will not be unhappy."

She smiled—oh, such a sad, bitter smile! "I love you, Reginella," I said. "I must leave you. I am leaving everything and everybody. I am leaving my mother."

She replied, "You will come back to your mother, but you will never come back to me. I am losing you forever!"

I caught hold of her and brought her to a bench at the edge of the orchard, and there, holding her on

my lap, I sunk my face on her breast. She cried and cried and cried. Her tears fell over me. I could feel her heart beating fast, her whole body shaking with sobs, her hands burning with fever. We did not say another word to each other. When the light faded in the sky, and the shadows of the evening enveloped us, slowly she got up. We walked down to the gate. Without turning around, without a word, she crossed the ledge and walked down the long alley of linden trees towards her home.

Thus in that mild evening of March, I saw Reginella disappear, Reginella d' Oro! For two years she had been the joy of my soul, she had brought to me every day more light than the dawn brings to the earth. Now, in the shadow of the evening, she was walking away! Through the great alley of newly green trees, she walked and disappeared, and I never saw her again. Never, but in my long reveries, in my passionate dreams. Her face has now almost vanished from my mind, but now and then it returns with a striking clearness before my eyes. For years, now, I have neglected love. The idea of making love to another girl appeared to me like wronging the one that I had let go that evening without a good word.

As time goes by I feel now and then a longing for love, a desire of living again, of tasting joy, once more, before youth passes away. I have at times looked a girl in the eyes, some evening in May, at the hour when soul seeks soul, and, as the spell fell

over me and her, I saw that marble ledge of the Villa della Regina arise between us and Reginella sitting on it as she did that night. Under the strength of her gaze, my eyes had to look down, my mind got confused, my tongue failed me. I made a fool of myself and walked away without saying a word.

XIII

THOSE FIRST DAYS

I HARDLY need to relate the details of my departure from Italy and of my voyage across the sea to America. I went through practically all the emotions that everybody experiences under similar circumstances—a great pain in kissing my mother good-by, a sad grip of my heart in gazing from the train for the last time at the country where I had lived the best years of my youth. The memory of Reginella haunted me like an obsession all during the trip through France, and I had a miserable feeling throughout the sea voyage, both at the heart for nostalgia, and at the stomach for sea-sickness.

When I saw the coast of America, I felt a relief that the trip was over, but an inward disappointment at the sight of the land of Long Island, so flat, so bare, compared with our smiling Riviera, ever glad with olive groves and oleanders in bloom. It was the last day of March, raw and windy. Thinking of the spring that I had left behind—rosy clouds of peach trees in blossom, over the hills—I had the sensation of being plunged back into a dreary winter, to a dreary task. I had a feeling of "I wish I were home! I wish I were lost in the mist! I

wish I could be dropped from a tower to fall forever and ever." I felt no interest in the land just appearing before me, no interest in anything.

We had rounded Sandy Hook and were now sailing slowly up the bay. The Brooklyn shore, ugly and desolate in the chilly morning, passed before my eyes. Leaning over the starboard rail, I gazed at it with a feeling of angry disgust. Everything seemed to offend my nerves—the red brick warehouses, the piers, the dingy gas tanks. As we got past the Narrows, a sign half a mile long struck my eyes, "Drink Hunyadi Janos." "Oh, la, la!" That was more than I could stand. I turned away my face, full of ill humor. In front of me, ahead of the bow, lower Manhattan appeared, its tall buildings towering above the mist into the sunlight, the great arch of Brooklyn Bridge gracefully spanning the river, the Statue of Liberty lifting her torch toward the sky!

The appearance of the skyscrapers was enough to dispel my blue mood. Soon I found myself on the bow among the rest of the passengers watching the town, commenting on the buildings, counting the stories, interested in the new and wonderful sights. The boat was now going up the river. It was about the time of the heavy rush of commuters from New Jersey. The river was thick with boats, the ferries loaded with humanity. The piers and the streets along the shore were swarming with people and vehicles. I was getting into the great city of the

New World while life was at its most animated moment. I couldn't help being attracted by the active spirit. I felt New York around me before touching the ground. The tide was going out, the boat had to proceed up the river, past the pier to get into her berth. I detected my brothers standing in the crowd. It was indeed a cheering feeling, seeing them there! I was entirely happy when, getting off the gangplank, I caught hold of their hands. I felt somewhat affected, however, at the sight of Benjamin's face. He looked pale and tired, though he declared himself happy and kept on telling me so on our way home in the car.

Vittore at once presented a little plan for my immediate future. I was to stay in New York for two weeks and then go over to Passaic, New Jersey, where his firm had a factory. I could undertake there an intensive study of English, and, at the same time, start my practice at the mill.

While in New York I was to stay with two French ladies, who would take care of me during the hours of the day while my brothers were down town. I found these two ladies very nice, and their place attractive. For two weeks they were my hostesses and guides through the city. They made those first days quite pleasant for me. At the end of the two weeks my brother Benjamin took me over to Passaic. The trip on the Erie Railroad, through the marshes of New Jersey, disconcerted me somewhat.

"Is this the kind of country I am going to live in?" I asked Benjamin, looking with dismay at the

desolate land that lay between Jersey City and Rutherford. Though we were at the beginning of spring and the day was bright and soft, the landscape around had no smile, and it gave such an impression of misery that it made my heart ache. Flat and marshy, with no vegetation but that tall grass of the prairies, dirty with waste of coal and ashes, covered with débris of all kinds, it was the ugliest place of God's creation I had ever laid my eyes upon, so far. I felt really worried at the idea of having to get my eyes accustomed to such sights. Why, what of the beautiful plain of Piedmont? Of the Lombard lakes? Of the valleys of the Alps? I would even forget their appearance, if I had no better land to see than this.

I plainly told my brother Benjamin: "I have come over to this country by your invitation, but I am afraid I have made a terrible mistake. I understand this is the land of opportunity, but I doubt whether I would care to be a successful man in these marshes. What is the matter with them, anyhow? I have seen marshes in Europe, but none as ugly as these. The landscape itself was bad enough, but it seems to me that men have done all they could to make it worse. Look at the heaps of ash cans, at those signboards falling to pieces, at the mud alongside the railroad tracks—even the water is dirty beyond words! Why don't they screen the land off on each side of the railroad, if they don't know how to make it look better?"

"I suppose they will eventually," my brother Ben-

jamin answered. "For the time being they are too busy in other tasks. This country is still in a stage of development and you will find many things like this to offend your delicate eyes—unfinished, spoiled, sacrificed to more pressing needs. See this Erie Railroad on which we are traveling, and those tracks of the Lackawanna over there, see the Pennsylvania Railroad, and further on, the Central Railroad of New Jersey! People have been so busy building these railroads that they have had hardly time to make these marshes look like gardens. This country is progressing with a rapidity that will astound you. Soon you will be able to grasp and appreciate it, but the task is of such magnitude that it will take generations and generations before the place will look anything like finished. Those who work to-day are maturing the most marvelous fruit of civilization for the grandsons of their grandsons—they will see it when ripe, not we."

"You mean to say," I answered, "that I have come all the way from Europe for the task of maturing the fruits of civilization for the grandsons of the grandsons of Americans?"

My brother laughed. "Well," he said, "we all will —the destinies of nations are like the tides of the rivers and we men are the drops of water. Can a drop falling from the outside do anything but follow the law of the stream? You will do here as everybody else does—work for your own benefit, to be sure, but also for the benefit of those who will come after you. Don't regret it. Over in Europe you were glad, I

suppose, that somebody in the past had labored and matured for you what you loved and enjoyed over there?"

I listened with amazement to these words of my brother Benjamin. Where in the world had he learned to talk that way? "It seems to me," I said, "that you are talking like a printed book. Who taught you these notions?"

"I suppose," he said, "I have picked them up for myself during this year that I have lived over here. Perhaps Vittore has helped me. You know, this country is quite different from Europe. It may not be so developed in some lines, but it has lessons of its own to teach us. Don't be discouraged because this little piece of marshland offends your æsthetic taste; there are beauties over here that one cannot detect at first sight, but they are worth those of Europe. Most of them are of the kind known as "ideals" and they are behind the facts and the emotions of men—something that we cannot see within a limited space, but that can be felt, after a long, intimate contact with the life of the country. I am just beginning to grasp the thought of them and feel the spell. I confess I was not enthusiastic about this country at first. I feel now that I am going to love it, if I remain here long enough. I think you will, too. I can't say anything more, but one thing I can tell you now, that this is no country for men of narrow ideas. You are not one of them. Don't be afraid of this country; it will give you all the opportunities you wish. This is a great land and beautiful, too. Don't be misled by the sight

of those few square miles of marshes. America stretches from here to the Pacific, from Maine to the Gulf of Mexico; there is plenty of fine scenery, plenty of landscape to suit your taste. Passaic itself and the country around it is not so bad if you look from the top of the hills towards western Jersey. Cheer up, don't be impatient. After a while you will be able to tell me what you really think of America."

This mistake of making a hasty judgment of a country after seeing only a most insignificant part of it, is quite the common thing among people who have not traveled much. I remember a man from Scranton, Pa., who used to tell me his impressions of a trip to Italy. He didn't think much of Rome, he said. What had struck him most while there was the fact that, on the morning after his arrival, he had seen on the sidewalk of the Corso a herd of cows being led by an old *buttero*. His idea of Rome had been of a great, elegant city. That herd of cows on the sidewalk of the best street had impressed him in the same way that the marshes of Jersey were now impressing me. That was all he seemed to have noticed. The fact that Rome was the immortal mother of law and right had escaped his attention. His visits to the Vatican and the Borghese Gallery had not been sufficient to wipe from his mind the disastrous impression of that first rustic scene. Every time I see him he tells me the same story: "The cows on the sidewalk of the principal street in town! Can you imagine such a thing happening in Scranton, Pa.?" I can't help

smiling; still I must admit I made the same mistake when I decided I wouldn't love America after having set my eyes on the Rutherford marshes. I want to say, though, that I have since modified my point of view.

On alighting from the train at Passaic Park, I was pleased to notice that the country there was more attractive than the marshes over which I had been passing. To tell the truth, the water of the river and the banks, too, were pretty dirty, in fact very dirty, but aside from this, the scenery was rather picturesque—fine trees and nice plots of grass in the little park, and on the side of the hill some good-looking wooden houses.

We walked up to the house where I was to stay. It was very attractive indeed, well built and well furnished. My room was large and airy and opened on to the roof of the porch. The owner of the house, Mr. Hostetter, was a Pennsylvania Dutchman about sixty-five; his wife, an Irish girl, was forty years younger than he. They had another boarder, a Dr. Tanner, who was there when I called. He was a fine man, native of New England, educated in Paris. He spoke French fluently and seemed to be a highly cultured gentleman. A current of sympathy established itself between us right from that first day. After visiting the house, I made arrangements for moving definitely to my new quarters the next day. My brother Benjamin then took me over to see the mill, which was in the opposite part of the town. On our way I was

able to get a rapid view of the hilly part of Passaic, to see the fine churches and the town hall. The impression made on me was good and the view from the top of the hill, on towards the west, was fine indeed.

On the morrow I moved my belongings from New York to Passaic in my brother's automobile, and in a very short while I was settled in my new quarters. My landlady helped me in the task of unpacking the trunks and then hauling them up to the attic. Though she did not speak a word of anything but English we got along all right, by means of signs, pushes, and pulls.

In the afternoon I took a stroll up the hill, passing along the avenues and crossing the streets to take a look at the houses and lawns. I didn't dare go very far, for fear of losing my way. This little tour of inspection confirmed my first impression of the town. People may smile at the idea of my finding Passaic pretty. I know it hasn't that reputation; still the residential section over the hill is quite attractive and, being the season of early spring, everything looked green and fresh. I had never seen before a place built on that style, with wooden houses and porches set amid green lawns, trees lining the streets, everything green—no shops, no traffic, no noise of street cars. I was quite taken with the town. The day was soft and balmy, the sky clear. Above the hills of Paterson, looking west, was one little pink cloud. Looking east, the river was just visible, shining through the foliage of the willows.

XIV

NOSTALGIA

THE Passaic River is associated with the memory of my keenest nights of nostalgia. Along its banks on the Riverside road, I have gone through some of those sweet moments that only melancholy can give—the melancholy of being lost in the world, without friends, without love, with the memories of your past pressing on your heart.

In my new home, Dr. Tanner had pledged himself not to speak French to me. Mr. and Mrs. Hostetter certainly tried to interest me in their English conversation, but it was too much of an effort and I did not care to keep it up beyond the end of dinner. We dined early, and as it was already the latter part of April the days were becoming longer, so it was still light when our dinner was over. I generally went out right afterwards, and took a walk alone along the river road.

That river is not a thing of beauty, as I know it. Dirty and lazy, it glides without ambition, either way, according to the tide. It carries with it, back and forth, the refuse of the Passaic and Paterson mills. Sometimes it smells. Yet, when the shadows fall and the evening haze veils the surface, if the wind blows

the smell the other way, there is some poesy on its banks lined with weeping willows. There is poesy anywhere, for him who knows how to find it. That black river suited the frame of mind I was in at that time. Its almost tideless flow was in tune with my sentiments. It reminded me of the river Styx, of one of those rivers of oblivion that Dante saw in his dream, without source, without end, flowing through Hades, eternally.

Walking along its banks alone, isolated as I was, I felt like a shadow, a phantom separated from the rest of men by the abyss that separates the living from the dead. And it was indeed so! How far was my real world from me! Miles of ocean, miles of land parted me from those who were dearest to my heart, while the men near to me were farther away still, farther from me than the stars are from the earth.

One evening, as I was passing by a little house near the bridge, a tiny girl ran out to me from her doorstep. I stopped, gave her a caress, and patted her hair. From the doorsill the mother smiled at me in a friendly way and spoke a few words to me. I tried to answer, but, of course, I only stammered incoherent sounds. She looked at me for a minute, surprised, then she walked over to me, pulled the girl away from me into the house, and shut the door.

I was a stranger. It's a sad thing to be a stranger in a new land! That woman didn't mean to offend me. She did what any mother should do when a stranger at the fall of night in a deserted place gives

a caress to her child. Who is he, the stranger? What is he doing here, alone? Why did he leave his home? People do not leave their homes unless there is a reason. I am sure that woman, when inside her house, shivered for her child and pulled her to her bosom in protection. Perhaps she looked from the window, through the blinds, to see whether I was walking away. I walked along with bitterness in my heart, with the feeling on my fingers of the child's soft hair, thinking of the child taken away from me in timidity.

I considered the days ahead of me. They would be sad. It would not take me long to learn the language, perhaps—but then I had to learn the ways, to know the people, to make myself known and acknowledged by them. In the meantime I had to endure their aloofness or accept the gift of their indulgence. I had to take my place at the tail end of the line and work my way up slowly, asking and accepting help—I, so proud, who carried in my veins the best blood of my land and in my mind more knowledge than the most of them, the wisdom of the race that had given civilization its stamp! A sentiment of revolt was aroused in me. I pronounced aloud absurd words of angry pride. I invoked the day when, breaking the fetters that held me bound, I should make myself recognized for what I was worth by the new people; and I meant to be worth more than they! But, then, for the first time, the thought occurred to me: "Are you so sure of this? Do you know anything about these people you expect to surpass? What have you done thus far in your life to justify your

claim? What can you show? Isn't there perhaps something that this country can teach you?"

Then the words of my brother Benjamin came back to my mind: "Be patient. This country is quite different from Europe, but it has something to teach you, all its own. It has beauties that one cannot detect at first sight, it has ideals back of the facts and of the actions of men. There is little that can be seen at a glance, but you will feel it after a long, intimate contact. Some day you will love it."

For a moment I was more unhappy than I had ever been in my life. I felt that, to love this country, I had to tear from my heart what had been most dear to me; I would have to change my tastes, change my life, change my will. What I had loved and dreamed and desired was far away, and every day would take it farther from me. Everybody and everything would be leading me into the new life—and I clung with all my force to the memories of the old world over there!

I have learned now to appreciate the spirit that this country has brought into me, the spirit that only the land of Washington and Lincoln can give. I could not grasp it then, I was not ready to receive it.

There is a law of conservation that makes a man abhor any change in his personality, similar to the law that makes him dread the advent of death. One struggle is called agony, the other nostalgia. Both represent the tendency to prolong the state that is the normal. This reluctance toward a change is inde-

pendent of any comparison between the old life and the new. The fervent believer has a secure faith in a future world of beatitude and bliss, but on his death-bed he turns his last gaze with infinite regret to those who were dearest to him on earth, to the rays of the sun that was the sun of his mortal life.

Reginella was an ever-present vision to me during those soft evenings of April—I saw her! I saw her walking on the green meadow in her light dress blown by the wind. I heard her song—that pure song that she had let flow out of her throat, like a bird, the day I took her up to our retreat in the mountains.

Now she was silent. What loneliness of deserted love was torturing her heart over there in her little garden, where the violets grew? I recalled her on the terrace of the Villa della Regina the day she came to bid me good-by. I remembered how she had looked into my eyes, lifting the lashes with her fingers, how she had uttered the tragic words, "You will come back to your mother, you will never come back to me," and then had walked down the hill, disappearing into the shadows.

I could not think of her without seeing the ghastly expression of her face on that last day, and feeling the weight of her body on my arm, as I helped her up the staircase. Cries of deserted lovers down the ages came to me through the night. It was as though I heard them coming from her, calling across the sea: The cry of Sappho—eternal. "The moon is setting, and the Pleiades are high in the sky. The

night is at her midcourse. Time is gone, and I am lying here, alone, in my bed!" Also the words of Miss Siddal: "A silence is in my heart that makes all my sorrows still! I spread my arms in the thick grass and so I go to sleep, dumb, without love, empty, like a thrashed ear of wheat!"

One night I was haunted by the memory of a little tune, a Venetian song by Pergolesi that Reginella used to sing in our happy days. It was full of melody and pathos in the graceful Venetian style, depicting a boy remembering the days when Nina was his only thought, then bursting into a cry of regret for his lost love, for those days gone by!

I started humming it, then I raised my voice, forgetting the place, all absorbed in the memories that the song aroused. In the soft evening I enjoyed hearing the melody develop. Sometimes a cry of regret would break from my lips, with the violence of a long repressed feeling. I sang it twice, three times. Suddenly a voice cut me short. A fellow walking along the edge of the embankment, between the track and the road holloed out to me: "Hey, hire a hall!"

Hire a hall! Hire a hall! I could have killed the brute for breaking into my dreams. Hire a hall! And I thought of Italy where anyone can sing his song wherever he pleases—of Venice, where the canals are full of sweet melodies; of Naples, where everyone serenades his girl in her garden, or on the hills, or along the shore, or on the bay under the sky full of stars.

XV

DETERMINATION

One must be wondering how with such behavior and feelings I ever made good in this land of action. Walking back and forth along the Passaic River, listening to calls from far away, and seeing fanciful visions, can hardly be expected to lead a man to success in this country.

I made the first step toward a concrete aim by undertaking the study of English. It was no easy task at the beginning. I proved to be stupid—I couldn't get the knack of the pronunciation. My teacher, a graduate of Columbia College, was sweet and intelligent and infinitely patient. She began by teaching me the sound of the words, then the spelling; next she started me on reading easy stories—Gulliver's Travels, and the tale of Christopher Columbus. The little pictures in the books helped me to get the meaning of the text. I was like a child at her mercy. She led me, commanded me, scolded me, when I was lazy. By and by I made some progress, and the reading matter grew more pleasant and interesting to me. Having found out that I had a taste for poetry, she gave me a graceful revelation of the dawning of English literature. I learned from her the story of the

humble servant at the Monastery of Hild, who knew nothing of the art of verse, so that at the feasts when for the sake of mirth all sang, he left the table. One night, an angel came to him and told him, "Sing," and he said, "What shall I sing?" "Sing the beginning of created things!" He obeyed, and a marvelous song broke forth from his lips. She told me this simple tale in a most naïve way.

As soon as I began to know the first principles of the language I joined an evening school of commerce, thinking that I would get double advantage from it, practicing the language and acquiring some ideas of business, which would help me in the future. I don't think I got much good out of that school. What I learned there didn't pay me for the mortification I went through. The school was frequented mostly by boys between twelve and fifteen—among them I had to sit.

The classes were in English, spelling, mathematics, and bookkeeping. As far as it was a question of mathematics everything was all right, but in spelling and bookkeeping I was the last in the class. I stuck to that school for three months. Looking back on it, now, I feel proud of my force of will. I hated it, but I had made up my mind that I would go through it, and I did. After one has graduated with honors at the University of Turin, to adapt oneself to be the last pupil in a boys' school in Passaic is real heroism!

I have an idea, though, that it was a mistake on my part, because it helped to depress my spirits. I lost confidence in myself, I felt that if I were to go out

with people I would be handicapped in the same way as I was with those boys, and more, I would be uninteresting and ridiculous. I began avoiding people. Undoubtedly that was harmful to me. When coming over from Europe I had brought with me letters of introduction to some very nice people in New York. Now, I disliked the idea of going to seek them. It seemed to me that I would appear as if looking for help. No doubt at first I would have been well received, but, after a while, I might make a nuisance of myself on account of not being able to talk. So I decided to postpone my calls. The summer came, then the autumn. Finally I decided that it was too late to appear before people with letters of introduction six months old, so I tore them up and thought of them no more. It was too bad, because it retarded by several years my initiation to social life. During those years I lived rather aloof from everybody and my character was not improved by that. Men need the company of other men, also of women. I regret those lost years when I isolated myself, through false pride, which made me reluctant to seek people from whom I would have to accept courtesies difficult to return.

XVI

TALKING SHOP

ALONG with the study of English I was initiated in the silk business, which was to be my future career. One day Benjamin came over from New York and took me to the spinning mills. As we approached it, I noticed a smell that was familiar to me. I said, "Here is a smell I like." In fact, it was the good aroma of our silk, as I knew it so well at home. It is delicate and strong, healthy—different from any other odor in nature. It gives the impression of coming from something dry, sound, incorruptible.

I had grown up, so to say, among cocoons and silk. In the spring all the farmers around Castelbetto raised silkworms. One of our farmhouses had a reeling mill connected with it. I had often given a hand in the raising of the worms and the reeling of the silk from the cocoons. It was one of our great amusements when children, to go out in the spring, and, climbing the mulberry trees, to pick the leaves on which the worms were fed. As springtime came, we watched anxiously for the leaves to come out, inquiring every day of the women about the eggs, and when the worms would begin hatching. The

women in our villages used to keep the eggs in their bosom enclosed in a satchel, so that they might be hatched by the natural warmth of the body. When the little fellows come out, they are not any bigger than pinheads. They must be hatched at the right time, just when the new leaves are out, so that they may be tender enough for their delicate stomachs.

You should see the way the little devils eat! From the moment they are born they are fed eight meals a day. They go for the food with a voracity without equal in the animal kingdom. If you get into a room where the worms are kept, you hear a continuous grinding. What eventually stops them from eating is the fact that, after a few days, they can no longer stay within their skin. Then they stop devouring food and go to sleep for twenty-four hours, during which time their skin bursts and they come out of it as hungry as ever. They repeat this four times, and after the last sleep they begin to make the cocoon. They climb on the branches of brushwood that the peasant puts on the trays for them and, throwing out a light web, they attach themselves to a twig. By and by, letting a fine thread of silk come out of their mouth, they completely wrap themselves up. All this is very interesting to watch. When we were children, we used to spend hours in the worm rooms, pointing out to one another the little fellows' antics, "Watch this, watch that," following them as they wandered around to pick the best leaves.

You may think that the place where the worms are grown would be dirty and smelly. Nothing of the

kind. The worms, if well kept, are nice and clean, dry, and not at all repulsive to touch. They are a bright-looking bunch, active all the time, whether they are eating or working. The peasants take more care of the worms than they do of themselves, knowing how easy it is to spoil a brood if it is not kept scrupulously clean. The raising of the worms comes at the best time of the year, when the farmers begin their active life again after the long idleness of winter. The country is all green, the fruit trees are in bloom, the spirit of spring pervades the plains.

The raising of silk worms is the first undertaking of the season, the heavy work of the fields not having begun yet. Generally the women and the children take an active part in it, and they naturally bring to the task their spirit always more cheerful than that of men. The best sight of all is the picking of the crop. The cocoons are found stuck in the brushwood as birds' nests are in the branches of a tree. They must be removed with a light hand, to avoid spoiling them. This is done by girls and children, and then they are thrown in heaps on the floor. You see the golden pyramids rise, bright yellow, on the white sheets stretched below. Now and then somebody picks out a handful and lets it glide out again, like a cascade of gold. If the work is done at night under the moonlight, the heaps shine with a vivid glow.

Within a few days after the picking the cocoons must be sold, before the chrysalis inside is transformed into a butterfly and begins to pierce the cocoon, in order to come out. Each farmer takes his

product to the town, in big baskets of willow. One can see these baskets lined up along the sides of the streets. Sometimes they are emptied and the contents spread over large sheets, so that the product may be better seen. In the silk districts the market squares of the villages offer a most gorgeous sight during the first days of June. They are often amusing to watch, too. You know, country folks are apt to be close and stubborn. They are a diffident lot when it comes to dealing, for they are always so afraid of being cheated.

Cocoons are expensive and the prices fluctuate from day to day, from village to village, owing to the conditions under which the sales are made. The number of buyers is limited; at the same time they must buy most of the year's supply for their mills during those few days, and likewise the seller must get rid of his merchandise before the chrysalis spoils it. The task is urgent. Brokers and speculators swarm and petty thieves roam the place, trying to steal handfuls of the precious stuff. All these are elements of fear for the farmer. He is afraid he may get less money than his neighbor, afraid of being swindled, afraid of being robbed.

I knew a great trick when I was a small boy. I used to tie a horse chestnut bur at the end of a string and keep it in my pocket. Walking indifferently among the heaps of cocoons, if, while passing a heap, I observed the owner had his eyes turned elsewhere, I would throw the chestnut bur in, and pulling it back quickly would find a couple of cocoons at-

tached to the bristles. It was a sporty operation that required cold blood and quick judgment. It was not devoid of risk, either. Sometimes the hand of the farmer would land square on my head, just as I was trying to get away with the booty. Sometimes it was a run and a chase through the golden heaps of the market. That was great excitement! As a matter of fact, I did not get much amusement out of those few cocoons after I had possession of them. I just took them home to let the butterflies come out. Those butterflies are not at all interesting. They are thick and heavy and neither fly nor eat. They move around clumsily, make love, then the females lay the eggs and within a few days' time they die. It isn't much of a life. We need not feel any regret, therefore, if they are killed wholesale before they come out of the cocoons.

This is what actually happens. As soon as the reeler has bought his supply, he brings it to the reeling mill, where there are special ovens for steaming the cocoons in order to kill the chrysalis inside. If the chrysalis were not killed within a short time, it would pierce the cocoon to come out, thus spoiling it. Once steamed, the cocoons are laid on large cane trays in airy storage rooms to dry out. From these storage rooms the reeler draws them, as he needs them for his reeling.

It gives me pleasure to mention here some humble creatures, who work at a task so strictly connected with the business in which I am engaged—the reeling

girls of the silk mills in Italy. When a boy I used to know some of those girls. They were the daughters of some of our farmers. I saw them in the fields, about the haystacks, or when they took the ducks to the pond or the calves to pasture. Often I saw them picking berries or gathering grapes in the vineyards and mushrooms in the woods. When they got to be ten or twelve years old, they left the field work and went to the silk mill to reel, while I went to school in town. They are still reeling silk at twenty-five cents a day, those little girls whom I have known in my childhood, and I, who sell the silk they make, am enjoying the comforts of an easy life. The work they do is no fun, and it requires a skill that can be attained only after many a year's practice. The selection of the cocoons is made over a big table on which they are heaped, and this operation, simple as it may look, requires a most expert eye, for the difference in the appearance between cocoon and cocoon is very slight. As a matter of fact, all the operations done in the reeling of silk are most simple, but require an infinite skill if a good product is to be obtained.

First the cocoons are brushed over, to loosen the outside fiber, then they are taken to the reelers. In the main room of the mill the reelers sit in two parallel lines. Between these two lines is the shaft carrying the reels, upon which passes the silk reeled off the cocoons. One girl generally watches four or five ends. Any little distraction of the reeling girl is apt to spoil yards of precious thread.

To keep their mind all day long on their work, they say prayers aloud all together. Over and over again they recite the rosary or the litanies of the Virgin. One of them always leads. From a corner of the vast room a voice is heard saying monotonously, "*Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum*" and then all of them repeat, "*Ave Maria, Ave Maria, Ave Maria.*" Thus they continue one after the other, those Ave Marias, for hours and hours, giving the impression of those rhythmic noises that mark the slow working of nature—the dripping of water, the sound of waves, the noise of the moths eating wood.

As soon as the girls stop praying you hear the foreman scolding them. Back and forth he walks on a little gallery running on top of the casing, within which the reels are turning. His business is to shout. From above he watches the girls working on both sides, and as soon as one of them drops an end or talks or laughs, giving any sign of being inattentive, he calls her every sort of names. He does it mechanically, insulting to the right and then to the left, both the guilty and those who do their work, as he knows that if he should stop one moment immediately the girls would begin to chatter, distracting themselves and doing bad work.

In one day a girl reels about one pound of silk. This is about eight or ten skeins. In each skein the girl sticks a slip with a number on it. This number traces the girl, in case of some fault found with the silk. In the Castelbetto mill I used to know the numbers of three or four of these reelers and even now,

while I am examining the samples of the shipments, if I happen to come across some skein bearing their slips I look at it with special attention, with a vague smile on my lips. "Here's the work of Mary," I say within myself, "here's the work of Rosy." I like to press the soft skeins in my hands. It almost seems to me that I can feel something of her who has made it. It may be a silly notion, but the idea of those silk threads seems to tie me to the old home, to the old times.

Entering the mill with my brother, I therefore had the impression of getting back to a place of old acquaintance. Right in the first room where the bales are opened, I was struck by the cheerful sight of big heaps of yellow silk. The sunlight, streaming through the great windows, made the stuff gleam like gold—gold and silver all over the mill—the yellow of the Italian silk and the white of the Asiatic, each giving, in the vivid light, reflections like white or yellow metal.

The superintendent was up in the spinning room. He came down at my brother's call. "Here is a new recruit," my brother said. "He doesn't know how to speak English yet, but he has a slight knowledge of silk and will be able to go about by himself and become acquainted with your work here." The superintendent was an Alsatian. He spoke French—and very proud of his French he was. He took me around, to show me the work in detail. "My motto," he said, "is 'Clean mill, good work.'" He pointed to a big

board, hanging from a rafter of the ceiling, where this sentence was written in large characters. In fact, the mill looked bright and neat, from the basement to the roof. One can't afford to leave dirt around in a silk mill. The swifts and spinners, revolving fast, would soon draw the dirt in with the fiber and ruin the product.

Evidently the girls had been trained to this principle, and to apply it also to their personal attire. Never before had I seen such neat workers in a mill. Each wore a white or light colored apron, with a big pocket on one side in which she stuck the waste.

After a few preliminary explanations, the superintendent put me right to work. With the same patience with which I had been sitting with the lads in the business school, I now attended to helping the girls in tying knots and spinning the silk in general. I felt quite angelic in my humble task—I drew from it the same pride that our ladies of the aristocracy draw from making themselves the servants of the poor at some period of the year, for a "spiritual exercise" as they call it. My little teachers didn't spare me my humiliation. They scolded me when I made a mess of a skein. They laughed flatly in my face when I proved too clumsy, with my big fingers handling the light stuff. I endured the rebuffs, I stood for the laughs, I plodded hard, and in a short space of time I was as good as they at the job.

For about three months I stuck to my work, going through all the departments of the mill and learning

the manufacturing done there in all its details. In the meantime I was improving with my English. This contributed to give me back my self-confidence. I was climbing back in fact, little by little, toward my normal place in life.

To complete my education in the silk industry, for about a fortnight I frequented a dyeing plant in Paterson and then for an equal period a weaving mill. The work in the dyeing mill was not half as pleasant as in our factory in Passaic. A dyeing plant, be it for silk or any other material, is always wet and dripping, full of steam. One walks in water and cannot help coming out soiled.

The mill I went to was a little establishment in the Riverside section of the town. Upon my arrival the first day, the proprietor persuaded me to take off my coat and give a hand in the actual workings. To oblige me he wished to work with me on the first operation, that is to say the "boiling off" of the silk. This "boiling off" has for its object eliminating from the silk the natural gum that is contained in it. It consists in arranging the skeins of thread around sticks set across a wooden vat, so that the silk dips in a boiling solution of soap. Every few minutes the skeins must be turned on the sticks, in order to get them dipped in the solution in a uniform way. Naturally, after a while, the whole skein gets soaked full of soap and water. The soap dissolves the gum, which will eventually be washed out, but in the mean-

while it sticks like glue to the thread, making the handling of the mass a hellish proposition. This was the kind of work I found myself up against.

My master went at it in a cheerful mood. "Here," he said, "I'll teach you, it's very simple." All the sticks carrying the skeins were at one end of the vat. He began pushing the first toward the center. "Now," he said, "catch the skeins on your side with a light hand and turn them around quickly, as I do." With three or four quick movements he had the skeins on his side of the stick turned over. I tried to imitate him, but the gluey mass of hot stuff slipped between my fingers and scorched me terribly. "Get the knack, get the knack," he kept on telling me. I was clumsy, I couldn't do anything but scorch my fingers. The skeins were heavy. To lift them, I had to get a good hold. With an effort of will, I succeeded in turning the first stickful over, but it was great torture. Still I stuck at it. I was sweating; big drops of perspiration dropped from my forehead. My friend laughed. Fortunately the lot was small, so the torture didn't last long.

After this operation, we started the process of loading and dyeing the silk. First we treated the lot with tin salt, then we washed it. Next we dipped it in soda to fix the tin on the silk and then we washed it again. We repeated these series of operations three or four times. I was beginning to think that the dyeing of silk was just a pretext for keeping on loading it. Finally we brought the stuff over to a vat containing a green solution. The actual dyeing was the simplest

operation of all. We just kept the skeins hanging from sticks moving in the liquid. Now and then my friend pulled one out, to compare the shade acquired by the silk with a piece of stuff he had for sample. He certainly had a sharp eye. Three or four times he showed me the two shades next to each other and, each time, I could have sworn they were exactly the same. They were not, however. He found the difference, and made me see it. Finally we struck the exact match and the operation of dyeing was finished. We washed the lot several times again, and then left it to dry out. I must admit that at the end of the day I was tired.

During the following days I kept on improving gradually in my knowledge of the tintorial art. I had, during my course at the university, made quite a complete study of chemistry, which included the general theory of dyestuffs and of dyeing. I had brought my textbooks with me to America, and they were of great assistance in making me understand quickly the process of which I was now learning the mechanical part. I was, in a way, surprised to see how my friend still made an extensive use of some of the old methods, and how, along with modern preparations of German chemistry, he employed those vegetable stuffs, in the handling of which our artisans of Calimala had become famous all over Europe during the fourteenth and fifteenth century. I learned the use of sumac, nutgall, divi-divi, gambier, and bablah.

The art of dyeing requires skill and patience. The operations are generally preceded and followed by long washings, a rather boresome task for a fellow with a nervous disposition. I remember I was particularly nervous in those days, frequently going through those spells of homesickness that have haunted me from time to time ever since I left Italy. It wasn't actual homesickness, but rather a longing for some of the joys that enlivened my summer days in past years.

We were in August—the time of the year that I used to spend in the mountains or at the seashore. A friend of mine had just sent me a snapshot from Viareggio, showing himself on the beach with his arms around the waists of two girls, friends of ours, all in bathing costumes. Under the picture he had written, "Why aren't you with us?"

"Why?" He ought to have known better than to ask me such foolish questions!

Why? Because I was working now—doing serious things—making the foundations for my future. I seemed to detect a sarcastic smile in my friend's face, and to hear him say, "All right—go on with your foundations, you who are so smart. I'll stick to the girls." Confound him! I wished I had him within my reach to give him a good thrashing. Why did he send me his silly picture to distract me from my work? While in the gloomy dyeshop, moving my mushy silk back and forth in the water, I could not help seeing the beach of Viareggio, all gay with people, the Tyrrhenian sea as green as emerald.

When was it that I had spent the summer there? Just a few years before. I remembered those joyful days! The best crowd of Italy and from England and America seemed to be there that year. The two girls of the picture were in our party, the Duchessina di Firenzuola and the daughter of the Countess di Sassocorvaro. What fun did we have with them —all day long on the beach, or driving along the road of Camajore, or tramping through the Pineta or up the hills of Mommio and Corsanico! We used to go out on the sea, too, sometimes, renting one of those *paranze* which have the sails either red or blue or green with a painted figure on them, a bird or a horse or a snake. Sometimes returning from our walks we took a flat boat and floated down the Fossa Burlamacca across the marshy land, lying on our backs as they do in England on the Thames at Henley or Maidenhead. And at night we danced in the ballroom of the Casino—we, the young people, while the older crowd sat around and watched us, talking gayly, the ladies making a display of their gowns and jewels, with emeralds on their fingers and pearls around their necks as big as hazelnuts. Wasn't it nice to be in a fashionable crowd, to be dressed smartly and to feel well, all limbered up by exercise, the skin tanned by the sun and the salt air, a fine partner in your arms to dance with?

Oh the girls, the girls! On the beach we used to get together a little crowd of ten or twelve, generally more girls than boys. With their hair loosened to the wind, and their bare legs stretched on the sand,

how jolly they looked! Their bathing suits were the sweetest attire that can clothe human forms—short, light, and of gay colors. When the breeze blew they seemed just to follow the form of the wearers, rather than to cover it. We used to run about and play those games where, in the excitement, one lays a hand now and then for a second on the flesh, live through the silk, or strikes with his nose a peachy cheek and gets a feeling like opening his mouth and biting. All those joys I recalled vividly. My mind was there between the mouth of the Serchio and the mountains of Carrara, along the Marina, in the ball room of the Casino, in the halls of the hotels, bright with lights, sparkling with diamonds, and gay with laughter and fun. Of a sudden, when the spell broke, I found myself in the dingy shop doing the tedious work, all dirty and soaked, with a big brute in front of me at the other end of the stick. What a shock! And I thought, "If my friends should see me here now under such conditions!"

I could see the little nose of the Contessina di Riola turning up in disgust. She, who had been so friendly to me at times, so sweet in the moonlight—I bet that my silly friend of the picture was now perhaps with her, receiving her smiles, making eyes at her! The nervy idiot! What did he amount to? A fellow who had never done anything in his life and who never would—no good except to wear clothes and change his ties twice a day. What was he compared to me who was working? Work was the thing! The rest was vanity. I tried to impress upon myself

these maxims that I had read in books, but at the bottom of my heart I felt a bitter sadness, for I knew that people at home were giving very little thought to that new virtue of mine. I was far away, alone, forgotten, out of the race. The world wants to see gay faces about, bright and smartly clothed lads. What does it care if one can dye stuff black or green or cocoanut shade? These practical virtues do not count. How my friends would laugh at me, if I should appear before them as I was!

A bitter feeling, an intolerable disgust invaded me. In front of me the dark lout kept on his monotonous task, without a stop, without interest, mechanically. I had to follow him, I wished I were as indifferent as he, as thick, as sordid. Happy he whose mind is ever wrapped in a haze of idiotic self-content!

These spells of depression, however, were not frequent, my natural disposition being cheerful, rather than sad. They were hardly justified either, as my life, even in those days, was not altogether devoid of joys. I went to New York now quite often, to spend the evenings with my brothers and their friends. I dined with them at the restaurants, and began to enjoy the plays to which they took me. I spent the week-ends visiting with my brothers, either in the country or at the seashore. Now and then, I went out for a little cruise in some friend's boat.

All the latter part of August I spent in a weaving plant. This completed my practical education in the

silk industry. In the meanwhile my English was improving quite rapidly. I was beginning to feel more like myself. Looking back upon those last five months, I felt I could be justly proud of what I had done. The foundations for my new career had been actually laid. I could make myself understood in the new language.

There was something else I had absorbed during those five months of contact with American life. The active spirit of the country had worked on me. I was still a little foolish and dreamy, and not yet rid of my old prejudices, but I felt a new force, now and then, moving within me. My ideals were not as vague as they had been. Sooner or later, I felt that I would be falling in line with the people whom I saw around me, coördinating my practical faculties for the accomplishment of my share of the great task in which they were all working.

XVII

MY BROTHER BENJAMIN

During the last days of August my brother Benjamin was not feeling well. He complained of pains in his back and the doctor ordered a period of absolute rest. We decided that he and I should leave New York for three or four weeks and spend them in the mountains. The Misses Mottin, the two French ladies in whose house I had lived, had a cottage in the Adirondacks and several times we had been asked to visit them. As my apprenticeship was now finished, we decided to go up and join our excellent friends for a while. The ladies were delighted to see us when we arrived. Their cottage, built a few hundred feet above the village of Keene Valley, was very pretty and most comfortable. It had a fine view and was an ideal place for a rest cure.

Benjamin was four years younger than I. While we were still at home there existed between us a stronger bond than that which generally binds brother to brother. We complemented each other intellectually, for we were both very fond of literature and art. I, being the older, had more actual knowledge, but he had a keener and more disciplined judgment. Often he developed most thoroughly the arguments

that I brought to his consideration, completing and coördinating the haphazard stock of notions that I had piled up for both. On the other hand, he often consulted me on some question of Latin or Italian literature, and I was able to give him the advantage of my longer familiarity with the matter. In finding him a kindred spirit, I was naturally drawn to make him partake of the feelings that a true work of art, either a poem, or speech, or a page of great literature aroused in me. Through me he learned Virgil and Horace and became acquainted with the best of our poetry.

I took a keen satisfaction in making that boy feel the emotions that I felt, when I came in touch with the pure beauties of the Greek lyrics or the gorgeous splendor of our modern poets. With him I did what the expert violinist does for a friend when he interprets a masterpiece of music that he loves. He watches the listener with keen eyes, to see whether he falls in tune with the theme, then he puts all his soul into the interpretation, so that the piece is an ideal means of conveying his emotion to the sympathetic heart.

In poetry, as in music, one can add something personal to the work of the great. Poetry consists of ideas expressed in words and sounds. The author disposes the words and brings forth the ideas, but the expert reader can reveal through the sound the beauties that are concealed between word and word. He can make the words sparkle with life and he can throw a soul into the images that they convey.

Through his interpretation the verse may become air or water, rock, cloud, cry of despair, smile, tear, blood, and flesh. He can put the one word into prominence which is the key to the whole poem, and leave the other in the shade. He can draw a spark from a verse and make it blaze like a torch, put an infinite melancholy into another, make his voice the equal of the wind, bring it up to the height of the thunder, let it die in a whisper, give it the modulation of the flute. One pause, one inflection, one strong cry can reveal infinite images, as lightning on a landscape in the night reveals rivers and forests, towns, fields, innumerable blades of grass.

The men with whom I had been living those past five months—what did they know of this virtue of sounds? Nothing! But my brother Benjamin did. And he and I were there together now, in the country, in a beautiful quiet spot, something like our valleys at home; and we were free from care and could indulge in our favorite talks away from everything. What a joy!

There was, of course, the fact of my brother's indisposition, but it was not anything serious, was it? A little pain—perhaps rheumatic. The good air and the rest would soon cure him. So we would give ourselves that thorough relaxation which the spirit needs. We would surround ourselves with an ideal atmosphere, in which we two would live, isolated from the rest of the world. And we did, simply and without any effort. We drifted into our favorite pastimes, into our old mode of life.

We used to sit, I remember, with our books about five hundred feet above the cottage, on a little spur which commanded a fine view of the valley. Our cottage from there looked like a toy in the middle of the green lawn, a blue line of smoke rising from the chimney. Tom, the dog, ran back and forth jumping about, looking as small as a flea. The valley was full of harmony in the noontide, silent under the sun. Above us Mount Macy rose sharp against the sky. As noon approached we watched anxiously the signal for lunch. When a bell from Keene Village struck twelve, a Miss Mottin appeared on the lawn waving a little flag. We shut our books and started down.

As we approached the cottage, a delicious smell made us speed our steps—a fragrance of parsley, and rosemary, and the fine scent of sage. We were not disagreeably shocked in passing from a poem of Horace to an *Audouille a la Provencale* or a *Gigot de Mouton*—"*Ars una, species mille.*" It is a mistake to believe that there is a substantial difference between the intellect and the stomach. Above a certain point of perfection the joys of one are the equal of the other. After the lunch, we lay down in the hammock.

Our friends were, indeed, the most solicitous and delicate hostesses that one can imagine. They knew how to make everything easy for us and, at the same time, let us have our complete freedom. They took us to the village, arranged drives for us, or took us to call at the neighboring cottages. They always had some friends that they wanted us to meet—"extremely nice," they said, "*une femme qui a été très*

jolie dans le temps." Their friends always had been "*très jolies dans le temps.*" The trouble was that the "*temps*" was the epoch of the Civil War or thereabout. We also met some young girls at the country club, some of them very pretty, but in those days I was a little bashful with American girls, on account of my awkward way of talking.

So the time passed, really restful and delightful. We often forgot that New York existed. We forgot our troubles, and that sense of sadness that had haunted me since I had left home quite disappeared. A fine country and good company are the same great things everywhere. They make life sweet, they give us that sensation which, for lack of a better word, we call contentment.

I had brought with me some Italian and French books, many of them poems that both Benjamin and I knew very well. As a lover enjoys the company of his beloved in a fine setting, so we thought it would be with us and our books. But this did not prove to be the case. Sometimes, while reading aloud, I felt that I had not Benjamin's attention and sometimes I felt my own mind drifting far away. What was it? Were we losing our taste for poetry? I think not, but between the visions of poetry and ourselves there was now real life—American life. Often I closed my book after the sound of the last verse had died away, and no reverie followed the sound. Sometimes I opened the book and did not read at all. Benjamin and I drifted into conversation. We forgot

the ballad of Isoatta Gottadauro and spoke of New York, of the present, of the future, of what we were going to do.

Benjamin had come over to America about one year before me. He also had been in Passaic for a while and had gone through the same training as I had, then later he had spent six months in a mill in Scranton. He had very often felt very lonely, he told me, stranded there where, apart from the mill people, he knew no one. But being alone gave him the opportunity of thinking matters over, of questioning the present and planning the future, besides remembering the past. Possessing a more positive mind than mine and a stronger character, he had soon learned how to refrain from idle regrets for days gone by. He realized that he had to make a big change, and that the period of transition would be made less painful by making it shorter. Instead of being jealous of his old self, he let the new spirit pervade him, opened his heart to it. Of course, now and then, nostalgia would hit him, but what good would it do to be crying over the past?

With his keen mind he soon grasped the sound spirit of the great civilization over here: "Work and honesty—keep these by-words in mind, and seek your joy in coördinating your life to this plain program." I remember how I looked at him, my young brother, with a little smile on my lips—so serious was he, and somewhat flushed, with such force in his voice.

"Now look here," I told him, "it seems to me that this program is not restricted to America. Haven't

we heard the same thing, every day of our lives, over in Italy?" He smiled in his turn.

"Yes, indeed," he said, "perhaps more than necessary. We heard it in prose, we heard it in verse, we have seen it written in a good many inscriptions. Still, setting aside the item of honesty, I want to ask you a question: How much did we work when in Italy?"

"Well," I said, "we were students over there and not supposed to work. You don't expect me to believe that students here do more than we did at home."

My brother laughed.

"Perhaps," he said, "I didn't put the question to you, in the proper way. What I meant to ask you was, whether you saw among the people in Italy the same spirit of activity that you find here. All those young men hanging around the Portici di Po in Turin, or the Café Aragno in Rome, or the Galleria in Milan were through with college, but they spent many idle hours of the days gossiping and discussing Byzantine questions."

Here he mentioned half a dozen names of well-known men in Turin, sons of good families and members of the best clubs, who sported about in fine clothes, driving fast horses and keeping beautiful mistresses.

"Well," I said, "those were *intellectuals*." Again he laughed.

"I am afraid," he said, "that over in Italy we have too many of those *intellectuals*. Perhaps we were too much of that type ourselves. We shall have to cut out this 'intellectuality' if we want to make any

headway in this country; stick to the plain program I have just stated—'Work and Honesty.' We may take up 'intellectuality' again when our active task is finished. Let us be modern—let us react against our national tendency to forget life's realities, to lose ourselves in dreams!"

I stared at him. I had never heard him talk that way before.

He continued: "Isn't it you who used to admire Helen of Troy? 'Proceeding so proud over the ruins of the city, in the glare of the fires? Above her head the full moon—she more beautiful than the light of the moon wrapped in her peplum of gold!' You recited these verses with an emotion in your voice as if you spoke of the woman beloved. But when Mary came along, or Lisa, or that other one with the blue-gray eyes, did you think then of your Helen of Troy? Those girls Mary and Lisa wore no peplum, but plain cotton shirtwaists, with the grace common to the girls of Turin. They had no Greek profile, only little, turned-up noses, but they were young and real, flesh and blood! When with them you forgot your dreams of Helen of Troy, and found out that the poetry of Homer wasn't worth a kiss from such lips. Now you will find a similar condition when coming in contact with the realities over here. A little deed done by us will be greater than a great deed that was done by someone else. Enough have we admired Julius Cæsar, who subdued the Gauls, Michelangelo, who created the 'Moses,' Dante, who wrote the Divine Poem. Let us do something ourselves! Small though

it may be, it will give us a satisfaction such as we have never had from the consideration of deeds or masterpieces of others."

"Here," I said, "Benjamin, I do not quite understand you. Are you going to deny the immense value of art, poetry, glory, and beauty?"

"I am not," he answered. "What I am trying to explain is that we have to consider our tendency to give a sterile admiration to the great, without a corresponding positive effort to emulate them. Are we fond of poetry? Let us go ahead and produce works of poetry, provided we think we can do it so that it falls in line with the treasures which already exist. But you and I, and those other 'intellectuals' whom we know, haven't done a thing towards producing; we are just limiting ourselves to the contemplation of the works of others. And the funny part is that we are under the impression that we are superior to those who work plainly at their tasks, to the men who sow the wheat, or plow the field, or build a house or work a loom, or buy and sell and carry on their commerce. Didn't you say to me one day, 'I am afraid I am stepping down one step in undertaking a business career'? From where do you step down? Perhaps from the clouds?"

He stopped. I stood perplexed for a while. A little hint of what Benjamin was now telling me I had already felt. I had gotten it from the talk of the people about me, from the sight of what they were doing, from the feeling that caught me, now and then, in the rushing crowds.

Still I insisted: "Don't forget," I said, "that we do not live by bread alone or by the material things of life. Poetry has done a great deal for us, it has made many hours sweet, it has consoled us in the sad days. Those past months in Passaic, when I felt the sting of homesickness and found myself most lonely, it was a great relief for me to abandon my fancy to dreams of poetry. At night, walking along the road, I could evoke over the marshy lands visions of our Umbrian landscapes, as Carducci has described them, with the georgic scenes alive with blazing visions of historical glory. I have thanked God many a time for this power of fancy that He has given me, by which, over the flat aridity of a land without beauty, I can build a world in which I can take refuge. I am sure that you, too, Benjamin, have done the same there in Scranton, where you were lonely."

"Yes, I also," said Benjamin, "walked out in the evening. I, too, was tired and lonely and felt inclined to dream. But there was within me something stronger than the tendency to reveries; there was a desire to catch the meaning of the life going on around me. Here and there over the landscape, I saw against the sky the huge outlines of the coal breakers, the piles of coal remnants burning slowly in the night. The miners passed me, going home in the dark with the little lamps on their caps. I heard the puffing of the locomotives pulling up hill. Before me was that Lackawanna valley where Scranton lies, chock full of coal below its surface, and those tracks from the west, where lie thousands and thousands of square

miles of wheatfields and cornfields or pastureland, and I thought of the wheat, of the corn, of the hay, I thought of the iron and the copper that are in the region of the Great Lakes, of the oil and the gold that the West holds, of the immense fields of tobacco and cotton in the South. I thought of the fruit groves of Florida and California.

"And then I thought of New York and of the men there by whose intelligence and will those riches were being distributed. I would be soon taking my place among them at that task. What was going to be my rôle? Carletto, you and I were not born to serve! We have climbed up with glad hearts from the steps at the bottom of the ladder, because we know that in that way only can one reach the topmost. But it is the topmost rung that we have in mind. To get there we shall have to compete with the best men over here. Don't forget that these men know a lot about dealing and trading. They do it in a simple plain way, apparently easy, but when you try to do as they do, then you find out what intelligence and will there are back of those simple ways. To compete with them you must be always ready with your time, your intelligence, your activity, and your energy!

"Now, those poems that we loved so much will do us no good for this task; drifting after them might do us harm. Let's forget them and make of our lives one great poem by doing well what we are undertaking to do. Let us make it a point to stick to the positive, to act and not to dream. Let us accept the teaching of these people here, who do not boast of half-

divine deeds, but can show day by day the fruit of their labor. Let us work hard!"

I replied, "You are right. Let us work hard!" And I remembered the words of the Greek slave on the road of Ascra: *"He does well who does* (something); *only he who doesn't* (do anything) *does wrong."*

Thus Benjamin and I spoke on that golden day of September, when we decided to give up poetry for the sake of reality. We were sitting on a ledge of rock overlooking the valley. Evening was falling. The forests on the side of the mountains stood calm and still. The smoke of great fires way off beyond the ridges gave a pearly tone to the eastern sky. But Mount Marcy stamped its outline against the western horizon. The valley was growing full of shadows. Everywhere there was silence—no step, no voice, no song of birds! The autumn was ripening for us the great fruit of poesy that is the gift of the lands where no other fruit grows. But we disdained the gift. Again we said, "Let us forget dreams!" and we started down towards the cottage.

I had to close my eyes now and then, lest the great sight should lift me, as by a stroke of wings, above the limits that we had imposed upon ourselves. I was giving up poetry that day, in cold blood, as one gives up a girl whom he loves, as six months before I had given up Reginella and let her walk down the avenue of trees, and disappear into the shadows of night.

That night, before going to bed, I stood by the window of my room and watched the mountains and the valley below shining in the moonlight. I was feeling worn, my mind was empty. Fragments of old poems or phantoms of past life presented themselves to my memory, but I brushed them aside for the sake of the pledge I had made to myself. Outside, high in the sky, was the full moon—all the house was asleep. For an hour I stood, without thoughts, just gazing, holding my poetry within me. Suddenly a clock from somewhere broke the silence. Then a poem, just a little one, came from some remote corner of my memory:

By my bed, the Moon spreads its vivid light,
Like white frost, shining on the ground.
I lift my forehead and contemplate the Moon,
I bend my head and think of my home, far away!

Such are the tricks that poetry plays upon me! Even now, after I have been ten years in America, I forget business now and then and drop into my old habit of dreaming. I suppose I am wrong—Benjamin had given me the right advice. I should have cut out dreams altogether. Or perhaps it's I who am right? Who knows? When I return to the world of reality, after my flights into fancyland, I go to work with a keener will. I feel like those who have been on the top of the mountain, when they get back to the plain. It is good, now and then, to get in touch with the sublime, but one must know how to get back to earth. Behind his fantasy one must have a will. Perhaps

Benjamin, who knew me well, was afraid that behind me there wasn't will enough!

Poor Benjamin! I never can think of him that I don't feel my heart clasped, as in a clutch. He had no luck in life, that boy brother of mine! The pain in his back did not disappear with the rest-cure—if anything, it grew worse. I remember that now and then, as we walked along the trail, or sat on the porch, he would suddenly place his left hand behind his back, with an expression of pain.

"What is it?" I asked. "Nothing, just a pang, it's all over now," he would answer smilingly, but his face was white. Thus he kept on saying that it was nothing, that it would pass, till one day the pain was so intense that I insisted we should go to consult the doctor in the village. We walked down to his house. He was an old doctor, a man of leisure, who spent the summer in the valley and the rest of the year either in New York or in Europe. He heard the story of Benjamin's trouble, then he examined him. He made him return the next day for a further examination, then the following day again. He seemed to be perplexed about the nature of the illness. Finally he pronounced his verdict:

"My boy, you had better go back to your home in Italy, and stay there until you are recovered. I will prescribe a diet for you to follow but, more than anything, you will need home surroundings and the care of your family."

My brother stared at him. "What do you mean?"

he said. "Is it as bad as that? What's the trouble with me?"

"Well," the doctor answered, "I'd like to be mistaken, but I am quite positive it's a form of nephritis. Don't be alarmed. You may recover in due time, if you take the proper care of yourself, but you can't neglect an illness of this kind. Five or six months of good care and rest will put you on your feet. By next spring you may come back to this country and take up active life again."

Benjamin made no further reply, but by the deep groove that marked his forehead I measured his inward distress. Coming back home, he didn't say a word, but at night, in his room across the partition, I heard him burst into tears.

Poor boy! The next day we bade good-by to our excellent friends, all upset by the sudden turn of events, and went back to New York. Our brother Vittore was then in Europe. Benjamin would have liked to wait for his return before sailing, but I insisted that he should leave without delay. Those three or four days before his departure we spent together, trying to be gay. But a strange anguish was at the bottom of our hearts. We both felt that there was something really wrong with him, that he would never come back.

The day he sailed I went over to Hoboken to see him off. It was a stormy day of September, such as we often have on the eastern coast, about the equinoctial time. Great clouds, whipped by the wind, moved

across the sky. The river was choppy. The sight of the Palisades, in the lurid light of noon, was grandiose and tragic. I bade him the last good-bye on board. I told him to give love to mother and to all at home—to cheer up and come back soon. I kissed him on the forehead. Then the boat sailed. When I reached the ferry to cross back to New York, the rainstorm, which had been threatening for a while, broke with terrific violence. Torrents of rain poured down, blown violently by the wind against the panes of the ferryboat. We could hardly see our way amidst the traffic on the river. I gazed through the windows, trying to catch sight of the boat that carried Benjamin away.

When we got almost to the middle of the stream, the great shape loomed in front of us. We had to slow down to let her pass. And I watched the ship go, which was carrying my brother home, the tragic boy, whose life was then being broken forever.

Poor boy Benjamin! I have grown since then into a man. I have lived ten years of intense life and have attained a position in the business world. He has been for ten years tied to his chair, paralyzed. What evil hand struck him down, just at the beginning of his career? Why were we who played together as children, and who planned for the years to come on the ledge above Keene Valley, why were we, by the hand of fate, thus divided—he who had the will for the deeds, thrown aside to dream, I who was born to dream, left to live and do?

No greater injustice had I ever known! Never such a tragedy! A month after he had left New York news began to arrive: "He is doing fairly well, though the pain in his back continues. We hope for improvement with the advent of better weather. His general condition is good, his morale is high." How many times have I read this story in the last ten years! Every letter from my family has brought it. Meanwhile, little by little, he has been declining. His legs began to fail, first he had to walk with a cane, then to go about in a carriage, now he cannot move from his chair but has to be carried around like a weight. What a tragedy!

I remember when I saw him again for the first time, on my return to Turin, after four years' absence. He had been brought to meet me at the station, and as the train was late he was waiting in the hall of the hotel, across the way from the depot. My mother and my brothers and sisters were at the train. When I stepped out, not seeing him, I asked at once, "Where is he?" They took me over. He was sitting in an arm chair, alone in a corner, somewhat in the shadow. As I entered the place, I was struck by the appearance of his white face, against the dark velvet of the chair. His cheeks were sunken, a deep groove marked his youthful forehead, a strange glare was in his eyes. I felt my knees tremble, I felt that something was wrong, that the boy was done for—condemned forever!

Resting his arms on both sides of the chair, he lifted himself up. Me embraced. But he glided out of my embrace and fell back into the chair. He said it

was the emotion. I knew it was his legs that would not support him. I felt my heart turn, a pall before my eyes. I could not stand the anguish. I swooned!

This time it was I who claimed that it was the emotion that had overcome me, the shock of seeing the family again after such a long absence. But my brother understood. He didn't say anything right then, but while we were alone at home the next day, he asked me, "Well? You didn't think you would find me in this shape! did you?" And as I tried to console him, he said, "Don't."

He turned the conversation to other subjects; then, later on, he resumed: "I am a condemned man. Too bad! I wish I could have stayed with you in America and lived. You have changed, you! I like the new appearance you have taken on. You look more serious, a little stiffer. You talk differently, and have a keener look altogether. What is it in that country that changes one so? I suppose if I had lived there, too, for these four years I would be looking like you."

Then he began asking questions about the country and the business. Now and then he looked at his legs, saying, "Too bad, too bad!"

I didn't try to make things look important. Still, I had to tell him about the growth of our business since his departure, and I couldn't help occasionally expressing admiration for this or that thing in America. "I thought so," he said. "I had the right idea

from the beginning. You didn't like it at first, but I told you it was worth while being patient." And he talked over with me the memories of the brief days we had spent here together, in New York and in Keene Valley. He remembered everything point by point.

In those last four years his life had been altogether devoid of events, so any little incident of those days took now in his imagination the importance of a great deed. Also his imagination carried him into years to come. "When I get well," he would say, "and get back to you, we will have to do so and so." He built new plans and distributed the work. What a strong combination we three brothers would have made!

But then, with a sad smile, returning to reality: "Well! the trouble is that I won't be getting well. Confounded legs!" and he tapped on his lap with the palm of his hand, poor boy, to mean his legs were gone.

Again I tried to console him: "There is no reason to despair. Some day you will throw the confounded disease out of your system and once more acquire the use of your legs; there have been many cases of the kind."

"That is what they all say," he told me with a wan smile. "But I know well enough I am not going to get rid of this."

In a concise way he explained to me the nature of his disease, the failure on the part of his kidneys to

eliminate the albumin from his system, the subsequent poisoning of his blood, the alteration of the spinal liquid, the growing deformation of his spine, so that some vertebræ pressed upon the locomotor nerves, putting them out of action. He used scientific terms, seeming to be well versed in the most minute details of physiology and anatomy.

I remarked to him, "How did you get all this knowledge? You talk like a doctor."

"My dear," he said, "when one is sick one gets to know a lot more about oneself than one would if one were healthy. I have been listening now for four years to doctors' talk about me, and following the signs of the creeping illness within myself. My judgment is as good as any doctor's. I have no chance."

He said these words with the firm tone of the man who says a tremendous truth about himself and accepts it with a brave heart. Then he added: "Don't worry, after all one doesn't live only with one's legs. My brains are all right. Even from this chair I can follow many sides of life. There are intellectual joys of which I can partake—the joys to which you led me, you remember? When I was a youth, before we went to America."

He turned to the shelves by the wall. "You see those books? I spend practically all my days in this library. I think you were right when you made me the eulogy of poetry, the eulogy of beauty. There is nothing like beauty to console a man who is struck by fate!"

By and by he forgot his illness, and drifted into the familiar talks of years gone by, when I used to spend hours with him, talking art and reciting poetry. I noticed that he had improved wonderfully in knowledge during those past four years. He not only knew thoroughly the æsthetic questions we formerly discussed, but he had spread into new fields, taken up studies of which I had just seen the outlines and developed them into exhaustive theories. I listened to him with astonishment and admiration.

"Why! haven't you been following the very path which you had bid me forsake?" I smiled in pointing this out to him. I reminded him of our talk that day, on the stone ledge above Keene Valley. He stopped speaking a while, smiling in his turn, absorbed in inward thought.

"I was right then! I gave you the advice in perfectly good faith." Then, with a sudden change in his expression, "I was right then!"

He had propped his hands against the sides of his chair, bending his body towards me, with all his muscles tight, as though he were trying to get up and walk. "I was right then, but how can I do differently? Have I any choice?"

Then, softening his voice again, "I can't forget those days in America, Carletto, and the great hopes we built there together. Who would have thought they were going to end so miserably? When I think of those days, I feel the bitter sorrow of having to live here, useless, of seeing no end before me but death. Carletto, I am not afraid of this death that I see com-

ing upon me, but I fear the disconsolate images that will fill my eyes when I close them and leave this earth without having accomplished anything, while you and Vittore have acted and built.

"The memories of America haunt me, Carletto. How can I forget the sight of the city agog with life —the vision of the river, the shock of the piers hit by the boats, the glare of Broadway, the throbbing life of the streets under the shrieking cars running overhead, the tumult of the metropolis with its rushing crowds, where at night those monstrous buildings stand with their hundreds and hundreds of eyes blazing with lights and where into the red sky rise towers and skyscrapers, while from the harbor horns blow and boats swing in coming from across the seas, and everyone strives and works? This vision will perhaps make my end bitter, as always does the memory of a deluded dream. What we hoped for over there, was in vain for me. My way is marked now, not by my wish, not by my will, but by the course of this disease that poisons my blood, paralyzes my legs, twists my spine, and day by day, bends me towards the grave. True it is that my brains are good. I can read, I can study. I can improve my mind and my soul, but then, why? What for?"

That night, alone in my room, I couldn't rest, I couldn't sleep, I felt like choking myself or crashing my head against the wall. In the presence of that paralyzed boy, listening to his words, I had realized, perhaps as never before, the immense gift that it is

to act, the immense punishment that it is to be deprived of this faculty. Benjamin and I had started off together. He had seen the way ahead for both, had trained his will for action, his will and mine! Then, as by a claw from behind, he had been caught. Now I must proceed alone, without him. His fate was to sit on his chair, stuck there! From that chair I knew he would follow me with intense desire, he would watch me grow, spread into new fields, get far beyond his reach, become a man. He must remain there a timid boy, forever. With that tragic truth in my mind that he must be left behind deserted by his fate, bending towards death, how could I push myself forward? Was it worth while to strive? Would it not be better to give up ambition and let the rest of life drift on, as long as no satisfied wish, no success, would ever repay me for the sorrow of leaving him behind?

And I thought of dropping everything, of never coming back to America, but spending my days by his side, making him feel my presence, making him realize that the link was not broken that had bound us to each other, and if he were to grow old there we would grow old together, and if he were to die, I would be by his side. Thus I felt, but—then?

Then life led me along my way, no matter how far from him it drew me. Benjamin is there, poor boy, bending day by day towards the grave. I proceed, gaining ground each year, opening up new fields. I act, I grow, I enjoy life. Now and then I feel as if a blade were striking through my heart—an eye wide open watches me from an infinite depth,

remote, alone, with an infinite love, with an infinite wish.

"What for?" I see the hopeless expression on Benjamin's face as he said these words. He well knew that it would do him little good to improve his mind, while his body was failing. Death would come by and by and wipe him out, mind and all. "What would be the sense of crowding knowledge into one's brains if one were soon to die? Like piling gold on one's own grave!" This he told me one day, when he happened to be in a sad mood. Then he added, "Still I keep on, you see," pointing to the four walls of the library. The books had been piling up on the shelves around him during those years, wrapping him within. "I keep on, Carletto, for it seems to me that my living is not altogether useless if, when you are back here on your visits from America, I can talk with you of the things you love and give you the advantage of what I have learned during my long days of leisure. You placed the foundation for my culture. You led me to appreciate and love things beautiful. Now that you are engaged in other more active tasks, I like to dig out a beauty or two for you during your absence, so that when you return home you won't feel left behind, or altogether forsaken by your old loves."

He smiled—in his eyes there was a beam of pride. I understood then why I enjoyed so much the company of my brother Benjamin. It was the flame of my youthful aspirations that he was keeping alive

for me. It was my soul of old that he cared for and fed while alone with his books, and which, when I got back, he led back to me tenfold amplified!

He knew my taste. He had been permeated by it at the initial steps of his intellectual life. His whole culture was a continuation of mine, so that his newly acquired knowledge just grafted naturally on to mine. While I was striving for money out in New York, he ripened for me and then offered me the marvelous fruits that literature and art are bearing for us men, and which most of us can not pick, being engaged otherwise in procuring for ourselves food and easy living.

This work Benjamin has been doing for me now for ten years. Each time I return home I find him a little more bent, a little more worn by the disease. But keener and deeper, each time, is the light that his eyes reflect of his mind—more ethereal!

Every year in the spring I make a visit home. The library where Benjamin sits faces south and west. The best section of the Alps spreads along the far horizon; between the horizon and the city is the vast green plain. A perfume of violets comes through the windows, and with it comes the sunlight and the breeze which carries all the graces of the Italian springtide—the spirit of the fields, of the trees in bloom, of the chapels, the cloisters, and the mossy brooks.

Here Benjamin and I sit by the bookshelves. He picks out a book now and then and reads to me. He reads the "Choir of Sophocles," the one by which

Œdipus is welcomed at Colonus, Œdipus blind, led by Antigone sublime.

In the quiet room the song rises clear and pure, modulated by the voice that reflects the even serenity of a soul proven to all sorrows:

"To the best of all lands, O Guest, you have come.
The rich-of-horses, blanching Colonus,
Where in the scented valleys the nightingale sings
Amongst the glossy ivy, and in the sacred wood,
Bearer of fruit, closed to the rays of the sun and to the wind."

He likes to greet me with this divine song, Benjamin does, every time I go home. He knows that under the touch of the great poetry my emotion in being back home increases and softens.

Is Colonus the best of all countries, where in the scented valleys the nightingale sings? Or is it our own land right there before us, between us and the Alps—that land where he, Benjamin, and I were born and grew up, where we meet now, to seek again the joys of our youth, changed though we be, he sick, destroyed, I turned into a matter-of-fact man?

I listen to the tragedy of the blind king, but I have before my eyes the tragedy of my own brother, struck down in the flower of youth. I listen to the praise of the Attic land, but I breathe the scent of my own plain, and, through that gift that I have of conciliating the old and the new, the creations of

art with my own life, I am lifted into a tragic world above human reach, fatal, infinite, sublime!

Thus Benjamin, my boy brother, secluded in his room, waits through the years with infinite patience, for my home-coming and prepares new beauty for me, to make himself useful, as he says, while his life lasts, while Death is on her way to come and close his eyes.

In this book, which is the noblest effort of my life, I want the figure of my brother Benjamin to stand out above all, an image without equal. Out of the desperate ruin of his life he knows how to bear a fruit, and, from his chair of misery, for no recompense but love, he lifts his hand and gives the fruit to me!

XVIII

MY AMERICANIZATION

As I have reported, my career in America began under trying conditions. I took my place next to the wage earners in the factories, to the stupid brute who shared with me the task of handling the silk in the vat. But the pride that developed within me as a reaction from the rôle that I had imposed upon myself was in proportion to the humbleness of that rôle. All my faculties were vigilant under my apparent indifference, and I was preparing steadily for the day of my transformation. I knew what sail I could eventually unfurl, but I kept it closed, looking forward to the day when I would spread it wide open with full knowledge of the wind. In the meantime I worked hard to conquer my new life.

Soon after the departure of Benjamin I entered the office of the firm in New York, and once again I started from the bottom of the scale—but the progress was now much more rapid, as I had mastered enough of the language to remove from my path the material difficulties of communicating with people. Everybody at the office was anxious to help me,

and I had at my side my brother Vittore, leading me with fraternal attention.

To be exactly truthful, he was not just leading me, but actually shaping me into a business man. He proceeded in a tactful way, modifying my personality of which I was so jealous, without hurting my feelings. He left it to the others in the office to initiate me into the details, but he conveyed to me himself the fundamental principles upon which our business was based. With his assistance, by and by I found myself coöperating with other men, competing with them, inspiring confidence, and commanding respect. Soon I learned how much force of will is needed to deal successfully, and I was trained by Vittore to face difficulties squarely rather than try to dodge them.

In the network of commitments in which I was getting enmeshed, I found a keen pleasure in seeing the results of my work. Little by little the strings in my hand increased in number, and the task of pulling them became more complex. But all the time I felt my brother Vittore there next to me, to eliminate the difficulties from my way.

The business in which we are engaged is manifold and varied. It takes years before one acquires the mastery of the complex set of problems that are connected with it. For five or six years my activity was entirely taken up by the task. After the first period, which was tedious, I began to enjoy my rôle. From the contact, and in competition with other men, my faculties were being developed and enhanced.

I was at the time of life when one passes from youth to manhood. For most men this passage is gradual and slow. For me it was drastic and radical. On the hills above Turin, in the great park of the villa, I had seen the end of my youth come. Spring had gathered around me then all her graces, had spread at my feet a field of flowers and softened with its colors and perfumes the sadness of the day. One girl, standing against the great background of our mountains, had consecrated the passing with her sorrow. Now, under new circumstances and in a different setting, I was being reborn into a man! Everyone took a hand in directing me—those who co-operated with me and those who competed against me. Each man I met, each deal I closed, contributed in opening my mind and stimulating my will, developing gradually in me a new spirit—the spirit of America!

It was during those years that the admonition came true which had been given me the day I left home by the voice of our hills and plains: "You will have to build yourself a new soul, new desires, new ideas, before you enjoy the new people and their ways. You will have to forget the names of your friends and learn new names." For about four years I lived alone. One cannot forget the names of his friends in a minute. Their memory stood between me and my friends-to-be. Rather than seek people just for the sake of intercourse, I kept aloof, finding enough company in my own memories, thoughts,

and reading. But as the new spirit slowly invaded my soul, I began to take pleasure in associating with people over here. Their problems and pursuits were becoming my own, so that the gap between us was rapidly being filled.

Large fields of my intellectual and spiritual life could not be trodden by them, some features of their character were not open to me, but we had enough in common to find each other's company pleasant. First there were the men in my own line of business, merchants and bankers—our interests were alike—then people of intellectual taste, lovers of Europe and Italy, also casual acquaintances made in the clubs and on social occasions. With most of them the relations were, at first, shallow, but I was often pleasantly surprised to find kindred spirits among those whom I thought to be the remotest from me.

Gradually my circle of acquaintances grew larger, but, being composed of people selected at random, in accordance with my sympathies which are manifold and fanciful, it was rather incongruous and somewhat loose. It was not until I had the opportunity of staying, for a while, in a smaller community that I became a friendly member of a coherent set.

My grafting in with American life took place in a small summer colony at the seashore. I lived there one season in a delightful cottage, kept by an aged lady of exceptional qualities. I met a fine company of young men, with whom soon I became intimate. There I learned how to appreciate and admire some of the best features of America. The place

was plain and simple and so was the life we led, but that simplicity was of the highest standard. The people with whom I lived seemed to have a perfect sense of proportion between work and amusement, play or sport. Early in the morning they were off for New York. They returned in time for a swim before dinner. The evenings were spent pleasantly along the boardwalk or in playing games. The holidays were delightful. I remember those warm forenoons of August and the spirit of healthy joy that reigned on the stretch of beach in front of our house. After the swim the place was agog with life, calls from room to room, comments upon the fine qualities of the water, merry rattling of cocktail shakers, outbursts of gayety and cheer.

From our headquarters we set off for the clubs or for our friends' houses. I found in that section a spirit of hospitality indeed admirable. The people who lived there were sound and thorough, they led a healthy life, and brought up their children in a splendid atmosphere of physical and moral health. I consider it a privilege to have been initiated into American life by those whom I recognize as among the best expounders of American standards.

Many of the people I met in the following years had visited Italy and made social acquaintances there. By comparing notes and delving into the history of family trees, we could often trace our way to common friends. Moreover, every American girl who has sojourned for more than a week in Italy has

been made love to, while there, by some Italian cavalry officer. As I knew many officers of the cavalry regiments, I was often in a position to get into rather intimate talks with some charming girl, who confided to me her sweetest reminiscences. In this way and through my ability for getting interested in fatuous international gossip, I made myself somewhat agreeable to people. My awkward way of talking was a handicap to me in some cases, but in others gave me an advantage, as there are people who do appreciate a little foreign touch. We were then in the period just preceding the war, when the pursuit of pleasure seemed to be at its apex. The dancing craze was sweeping over the country; all sorts of exotic steps were imported from Europe and South America; balls of Oriental magnificence gave the New York ladies the opportunity of displaying their beauties through the most gorgeous attires and also of kicking their heels towards the ceiling above any height hithertofore reached.

It was not long before the gay whirlpool of pleasure had sucked me in. More than at any time I felt then the fascination of the many-sided life that one lives here. In daytime I was absorbed by business cares, but the evenings were one delight after another. Now and then I took a few weeks off, visiting some place of leisure. I was asked to join some of the clubs in town. Thus I grew intimate with the life of the country. I sincerely enjoyed the people and their ways. I found real friends and after a while I had a home, I had everything—everything but love!

The problem of love is the one that has worried me for the last ten years. I suppose that human beings are like those plants that, transplanted to foreign soil, can live but cannot bloom. I have made but little success of my heart in this country, and, as I see the end of my youth approach, I feel a sting of sorrow for withering this way, without getting the share of love which is still due me. I blame no one in particular for this disgraceful state of affairs, but I am inclined to consider it a result of the change that took place in my life.

The memory of Reginella, no doubt, interfered for a long time with the free play of my sentiments. She and I for two years had been so attuned to each other that the pressure of my hand could convey to her my most delicate reveries, and, by the touch of her lips, I could feel and know all the harmonies of her body and soul. The girls who at first attracted my attention here were so quick that their hands slipped out of mine before I had a chance of conveying any feeling or sentiment to them, and their lips were more elusive to mine than a goldfish in a bowl is to the hand of a child. I refer particularly to some débutantes of the year that preceded the war. They perplexed me. They seemed to enjoy arousing my admiration, awaking in my heart hopes and desires, and then, before I knew it, they were gone, lost, playing the same trick with the next boy.

In times past, before meeting Reginella, I had been quite versatile with my loves. Those picnics on the hills of Turin were practically so many separate

affairs, with a new subject every time, and each one was a complete circle in itself, opening with the rising of the sun and ending with the dying of the day, but the memory of one lasted into the dawn of the next, so that they joined together in an even chain of love.

Here, worldly events seemed to interfere too much with any genuine sentiments. A certain débutante, whom I greatly admired, used to disconcert me altogether. I would ask her, "May I see you to-morrow?" and she would say, "Yes, you may take me to the Plaza for tea or to a matinée." Tea at the Plaza meant for me sitting at a little table, watching the tea get cold, while she fluttered from table to table for bits of gossip with her friends. At the matinée all her attention was on the stage, and none on me. I remember a show on Broadway where an actor by the name of Charles Bigelow was supposed to have obtained, under false pretenses, employment in a laundry shop. He had let a cake of soap drop to the floor and was trying to pick it up, but the soap under the pressure of his fingers slipped off and jumped about like a live frog. My little friend was much amused at this scene, but I couldn't help thinking that she seemed to be just as slippery to me as the cake of soap to the fingers of Charles Bigelow.

Later on I learned to appreciate flirting—*à l'Americaine*—and I practiced it with success, but never without a secret longing for those loves of old so dear to me. Sentiments of a deeper nature agitated my heart in later years, for some of the finest girls

that I have ever known. Of some I grew terribly fond, but there again I felt an intangible barrier rise between my heart and theirs. Who are we? What mysterious line is drawn between the different bloods of the white race that may prevent the attainment of that perfect union of thoughts and wishes which is love? Perhaps the instinct that prompts every intelligent being to seek the pure spirit of his origins, that it may be conveyed to his descendants, is accountable for that slight diffidence between man and woman of different blood, no matter how strong the attraction be between them?

The advent of love is like a revelation that we may be chosen for the immortal task of carrying the past into the future. But whose past? What life is to blend with ours for the creation of that new life which will be the continuation of both? Love is of a most sensitive essence—the slightest event, the least doubt or hesitation may prevent its coming into being at the right time! The best years of my life are ebbing away. I have known the loveliest of girls and here I am single and alone. Why is it so? Why should this be my destiny? Every one of my loves seems to turn into a tragedy or into a farce!

XIX

GLADYS GORDON

A FARCE

THE first summer that I spent at the seashore, it didn't take me long to decide that the most attractive girl in Seaclear was Gladys Gordon. She must have been twenty-two then. I didn't meet her till about the end of the season, but I had observed her ever since the first day I saw her tearing along the ocean road in her white automobile.

A couple of times she nearly ran me over, turning the corner of the bridge at full speed. I had to throw myself in the gutter to save my life, while she swung around the sharp curve with two wheels of the car almost off the ground.

At that time I was bashful and timid, but I couldn't help feeling attracted towards that girl. I had a premonition that I might burn my wings at the flame of her vitality, still I wished to meet her. She looked like a friendly creature, judging by the way she helloed to the local policeman every time he tried to arrest her. She flew past him, waving her hand to salute in such a cheerful way that the poor devil

didn't have the heart to do his duty. Her tremendous activity amazed me. I saw her playing golf and riding. At the tennis tournament she won two cups. She was an all-round athlete.

One afternoon the occasion came to make her acquaintance. I was sitting on the piazza of the Country Club with some friends, and she was taking tea a few tables off with another girl and a boy. A Mrs. Lawrence of our party noticed that I was looking quite often in the direction of the other table and said: "You seem to be interested in Gladys Gordon. Do you know her?" I said I didn't and she asked me whether I would like to meet her. As I hesitated for a minute, she said: "Are you afraid of her? She won't bite you!" I was not so sure of this, for she had the whitest row of teeth that I had ever seen and she was keeping them busy demolishing a piece of toast.

Mrs. Lawrence called her, "Gladys," and she came over. I got up and the introduction took place. Thereupon she asked me to join her and her friends. They were trying to get together a foursome for a game of tennis. I claimed that I wasn't quite good enough at the game and would unbalance the party. After a little talk we decided to play singles first, separately, and then see.

I played against Gladys Gordon, but she was entirely too skillful a player for me. I was so slow that after the second game, she sent for a chair to sit on in the court between my strokes. She beat me three love sets, anyhow. So we stopped, and

while the other couple played we sat on the steps of the clubhouse a little distance off to talk.

I mentioned to her that I had admired her for some time. She answered she had noticed me, too, at the Club's dances. She was nice and natural. I was surprised to find her so human and sweet. I told her so, admitting that I had been wrong to feel so bashful at the sight of her.

"You don't seem to be bashful now," she said, laughingly. She was bright and witty—just as quick with her tongue as with her racquet on the courts. Again I declared myself at a disadvantage: how could I have any chance with a girl like her? Wasn't mine a sad case—liking her so much and feeling no hope of gathering speed enough to catch up with her?

"Liking me so much!" she said, "how is that?" I couldn't explain, but so it was—did she blame me?

No, she didn't and she felt quite flattered at my frankness. She asked me what I would have been apt to tell her if I were not as slow as I described myself to be. I gave her the privilege of imagining the nicest things possible, in the line of homage and compliments, and I would confirm them later on, as soon as I had overcome that little shyness that I still felt in her presence. We were getting very friendly. She declared herself fond of foreigners. They might not know how to play tennis, but they said such nice things! They seemed to know the art of flattery better than the average American. I protested. It wasn't flattery, it was sincere admiration; did she think that I didn't mean what I had been telling her?

Mrs. Lawrence's appearance on the scene interrupted our conversation. She was pleased to see that Gladys Gordon and I were getting along so well. "She didn't bite you, did she?" she asked me, and told Gladys about my hesitation at the sight of her white teeth. We all had a laugh, and when we separated we were such good friends that she had asked me to call on her.

A few nights afterwards I took advantage of her invitation. Some of her friends were there and we danced to the victrola. She taught me some new steps. I was indeed delighted to have met her, and called myself a fool for having delayed so long in seeking her acquaintance. The next Saturday I took her for an automobile ride, and on our way back, we stopped to call on some friends at Green Point on the River. As it was a cool day we decided to send the car back and walk home. She lived on the Cliff. It was only half an hour's walk, by the lovely path that goes along the river and across the marshes. We had a pleasant call and didn't leave our friends till late. We had to hurry, for we were both due that evening at a dinner given at the Club.

As we got to the stretch of marshy land that we had to cross, we found it flooded. The tide was exceptionally high, and the water was about a foot above the trail. "Oh Lord!" We stopped at the edge, looking at each other's faces. "Fine fix!" It was after seven and we were due by eight. There was no way

of getting to the main road, but by going back to Green Point, and that would have taken a long time. Wasn't it distressing?

It was getting dark. The first lights were beginning to appear along the coast and on the highlands across the river. We had to do something or we would be unable to arrive at the Club in time.

I said, "Here! I think the only way is for me to take off my shoes and carry you in my arms." At first she was a little upset at the proposition, then she said, "Well?" looking into my eyes, and we both laughed. Necessity knows no law. I took off my shoes and picked her up. She put her arms around my neck to get a better balance.

Thus I ventured across. At first, all went well. I walked about thirty yards on the trail, then on a little plank across one of the ditches. After the first ditch the trail became very slippery, being all covered with weeds and mud. Once or twice my feet failed me and I came near tipping over with my load. She began to get nervous, saying, "Look out, look out!" But the trail was getting worse and worse. I seemed to be topheavy and I expected any minute to flop over, girl and all.

"Stop, stop a minute!" She wriggled in my arms, making it so much more difficult for me to keep my balance. "I want to get off." She wanted to get off!

I said, "Don't be nervous, just keep still and I will go slowly!" But at every step I skidded.

I said, "You can't get off this way into the water, shoes and all." (She was wearing a new pair of

white shoes and silk stockings.) "Why don't you take off your shoes?" She hesitated for a minute. Taking the shoes off was easy enough, but what about the stockings?

I insisted. "Go ahead! I will keep my eyes on the Lighthouse." She started to maneuver in my arms. The light blinded me every time it flashed. It wasn't my fault if I had to lower my eyes once or twice! When the operation was completed, she slipped out of my arms and we ran barefoot, splashing through the water, till we got out of the marshes. We got home in time.

That night, at the Club, we danced most of the evening together. I told her sweet things out on the dark porch, between dances. I felt too devilish for words. Instead of blood in my veins, I thought I had quicksilver!

The next morning, we met again, at the Beach Club. There was quite a little commotion at the Club that day, a big porpoise having been washed ashore by the tide a few hundred yards up the beach. Everybody had walked over to see the big brute, making comments on its shape and size. We first went in for a swim, and, after getting dressed again, walked over to see the animal. By that time, most of the people had gone and only a few boys were left there, watching the ungainly sight. It was a nasty fellow, black and hideous, as ugly as sin.

Gladys shivered a little and drew close to me. We were arm in arm. I felt her soft side against

mine. The memory of our adventure the night before was still making my blood flow fast. I said, "Are you frightened?" drawing her back tenderly. Then we started for the Club.

"I am not frightened," she said, "but the sight of that brute made me shiver." I told her I was furious at the beast for giving my little friend a scare. Didn't she feel safe under my arm? She smiled and squeezed my arm—again my blood took a fresh leap. We walked along the bulkhead towards the Club. Everybody was gone. The cottages seemed to be all screened in by the green blinds, against the glare of the sun. It was almost two o'clock. Now and then we exchanged a squeeze and a smile. She was gay again.

The scorching beams of the sun seemed to pierce through our light clothes into our skin, still moist from the recent dip. The ocean was as calm as a lake, no breakers, but a soft rolling of the tide on the beach. I felt well, I felt such an exuberance of life that no deed seemed to be too rash for me.

When we got to the turn of the boardwalk, I took both her hands and, facing her, said, "Oh, gee! gee!!" There was more meaning in that childish cry than in any speech.

"Eh?" she asked. "What is it? Summer madness?" But the same spirit seemed to have overcome her. Every few steps I turned around and seized her hands, drawing her face so near to mine that our lips almost touched. "Oh, gee! gee!!"

It was a summer game, boy and girl, under the

sky full of sunlight by the vast sea—a most dangerous one for anybody who wants to keep out of mischief. So dangerous, indeed, that in a sudden outburst I could no longer hold myself and touched her lips with mine.

Good Lord! I wish I hadn't. She stepped back, and freeing her hand from mine, gave me such a slap that it sent me reeling off the boardwalk on the sand below. It was as quick as lightning. Then, bending towards me, "I am sorry," she said, "I hope I haven't hurt you," and taking hold of my hand she tried to pull me back to my feet.

"I am sorry, I am sorry," she kept repeating, but I must have looked so discomfited that she burst into a laugh.

"I am glad to see that you are sorry," I said, while she took me by the arm again, saying: "You are not angry, are you? I didn't mean it, but I was so taken by surprise that my arm went off before I had time to think."

"So it must have been with my lips," I said. She pressed me to forgive her, and I said I would, though I felt angry, seeing her laughing, as though the whole thing was a joke.

At the Club, Mrs. Lawrence was waiting for us. "You are late," she said, "let us go," and, looking at my face, "Isn't he sunburnt?" she remarked.

I was sunburned only on one cheek, and I was afraid one could see on it the marks of those five fingers!

I must admit that I was very much disgusted at my misadventure. It was of little consolation to me to know that Gladys didn't mean to hurt my feelings. I was not actually hurt, but I had no ambition to see Gladys again, for the time being.

I was mad at myself. I should have known that I would get into trouble with that girl! Better leave her alone!

For a week or two I kept out of her sight. Then at the end of September, I left Seaclear and came back to New York where I had no occasion to come across her.

The next winter I went for a vacation to Nassau, in the Bahama Islands. On the day of my arrival I met one of the Seaclear boys at the hotel, and we lunched together. In the course of the conversation, he said to me, "Do you know who is here? Gladys Gordon."

She was sitting in the same room across the aisle from us, with her mother and another girl. I hadn't seen her since my misadventure and I would have rather preferred that she were elsewhere.

I still liked her a great deal, but I could not expect any good out of her presence in the place.

She had her back turned on us, so she didn't see me during the meal, but when the lunch was over we met on our way out. She greeted me cordially and declared herself most happy that I should be there. Introducing me to her friend, she said, "I

anticipate great fun out of our all being together in this heavenly spot."

"I hope that the fun will not be all on one side," I said. She smiled, thinking of my mishap. "You have been horrid," she said. "You never came to see me after that day on the beach. I almost feel that you must be very angry because of the little incident."

I said, "You don't seem to attach much importance to a slap on the face."

She retorted, "You didn't seem to attach much importance to a kiss on my lips!" I pleaded that it was the effect of the summer sun, that I couldn't have helped it.

"So with me," she said. "I couldn't help reacting, you so took me by surprise!"

"Do you mean to say," I said, "that, if I give you the proper warning, you will take a kiss and keep still?"

"You would have to give me a long warning," she said, "so that I have time to get accustomed to the idea."

"Then," I said, "you had better get the warning now, as this seems to me like a place that may have the same effect on me as the sun of Seaclear."

We had gotten out of the hotel, on the terrace, which is bordered by two rows of palm trees. There we all sat down, Gladys Gordon opposite me. She was indeed a beautiful girl, looking as fresh as a flower in her white dress.

That terrace is like a long pier, protruding from

the hotel toward the little harbor. On both sides there is a row of palm trees, and the leaves of the palms are just at the level of the terrace, so that one sits right amongst them. From below comes the aroma of the little garden and the soft lapping of the water.

The day was heavenly. I looked at Gladys. Wasn't she a peach? Too bad she was so quick with her hands!

We chatted. She was quite excited. The tennis tournament was to take place the next week and she had entered her name both for the singles and the doubles. She was to take part in the golf competition and in the races that were to be run on the little race track in the island, on Washington's Birthday. She was having a part in everything—her vitality seemed to be inexhaustible! I admired her immensely while she was talking, and felt proud to be her escort as we walked down to the tennis courts.

Soon I forgot the little unpleasant episode of the beach, though I carried the memory of it in the back of my head, to avoid running into a similar trouble again. We chummed a great deal, Gladys Gordon and I, we rode together, and played about the beach with our two friends. It was quite strenuous for me to keep up with her, and more than once I came near losing my life swimming with her, far out into the sea. She claimed that the water was so fine, it would have been a pity to go back. I thought it would have been a much greater pity not to go back at all. Out riding, she spurred her horse

to a tremendous speed, training him for the race. I had to follow, worried to death lest I would lose control of my mount.

I wasn't fit for this girl, indeed! Still, she attracted me so much! At times, when she appeared in her white sport suit, her racquet in hand, I had a secret thrill. I thought I was in love with her—she looked so stunning.

At times I sat at the window of my room and watched her playing tennis in the courts below. She had an incomparable grace and force in delivering the ball. Quick and sure, she was a perfect master of the game. Every one of her movements was in harmonious rhythm. Bent over the sill of my window, I often thus watched her, while revolving thoughts in my mind. What a girl! All the glory of youth seemed to radiate from her body. The play of her muscles could be detected under the thin cover of her dress. She seemed to be in absolute control of every movement of her limbs, to hold in her racquet any amount of force, and to apply each time just what was needed and no more. Her partner was a sturdy boy, as fine in his build as a Greek athlete, a fit opponent for her!

I envied the perfection of that couple. In looking at Gladys I felt a sting of melancholy, an indefinite regret, as a man who has passed the zenith of life does in looking at a girl just come into bloom. I wasn't old—only about thirty. But my race is old. The civilization to which I belong seems to have

made such a complex being of me that I shall never be a match for the youth over here.

Holding a racquet, balancing your body on the left foot for the service, hitting the ball, are too simple movements to be learned by a man whose nerves have been impaired by the influence of infinite atavic peculiarities. What a "dub" I was, when I was a boy! I wasted my time on my books and my dreams, following shadows of past days, listening to the grave and equal cadence of Latin rhythm, delving into ancient papers, for no use at all, just to satisfy that excessive thirst for learning that afflicts the Latin mind.

At eighteen I took a fancy for an old monk of the sixteenth century called Father Gambara, who had done remarkable deeds in his time. He was from the little town of Chieri, not far from Castelbetto, and, as nobody seemed to have ever heard of him, I thought it would be wonderful if I revived him for the benefit of my contemporaries.

It makes me crazy now to think that I spent the best days of my youth digging into the records of old sacristies, searching in musty attics or in stale family libraries for vestiges of the old fool. I gathered innumerable documents about him and his period, consulted parchments and manuscripts, scanned the archives of every town and village in Piedmont, and when I was through I locked the manuscript in a drawer, and there it still is.

When in Castelbetto I worked at this task in a room on the ground floor back of the house. Outside, a

few linden trees perfumed the air, while the inexhaustible poem of the crickets and the melody of the lark, sailing on high, kept me company. About three hundred feet away lived a girl of my age named Tina. She had a way of creeping stealthily to my window and unobserved watching me work, and then, of a sudden, she would burst into a loud laugh. Springing to my feet and pushing off the table, I jumped to the window after her. She drew out of my reach and laughed and laughed, and called me crazy and fool, while I called to her, "Come here, Tina, come here!" Seizing her by the arm, I pulled her face against the grating to my lips, and Lord knows what that little grating framed of youthful joy!

Why didn't I kick the old monk out of my way then and go with Tina, and do with her what Gladys and the boys were doing here—keep my muscles in trim, my life simple, my mind free of useless notions? Tina was gone, long ago, but Gladys was there, and I felt an irresistible temptation to join her in her games, to get hold of a racquet and match my skill against hers. But—but—I had tried it once. She had had to send for a chair to keep in time with my game. What would be the use of making a fool of myself? It broke my heart to have to leave her to the other boys who were more skillful than I.

Still, she was sweet to me. We had gotten into the habit of walking every night in the little garden of the hotel, our two friends and we. Through the

bushes we wandered and under the palm trees, often losing track of the others. She didn't dislike me. By that time of the day she was pretty well tired and seemed to be less athletic and more human. With a little abandon she leaned on my arm. She seemed to like hearing sweet things from me. At times, turning her head, she looked into my eyes with a long look.

She was very erratic, though. At times, in the middle of one of our sentimental walks, she would come out with a capricious wish. She wanted to go bowling, or to the village to see the Holy Rollers do their stunts. I hated tearing myself away from that heavenly garden—the nights were so full of fascination, the scent of the tropics was so acute!

Oh, I could have loved Gladys! In fact I am sure I did just then, and I think she loved me, too—in her way. She always had her hands on the alert, though, when I was getting too near her lips. It was easy enough to get within two inches of them, but no farther. We seemed to be in perfect accord about everything, except that subject.

I tried to convince her, appealing to her spirit of fairness. She ought to consider how handicapped I was in making love to her! I wanted to convey to her the depth and sincerity of my sentiments, but how could I, with such a poor command of her language? My emotions might be entirely misinterpreted, if I were to express them awkwardly. Why not drop altogether the intermediary of the language and let our lips get in direct touch? She found no fault

with my theories, but in practice she preferred to remain aloof. So the matter kept hanging in the air, much to my dismay, when one night a little accidental event brought about a happy conclusion.

The assistance came in the shape of one of those freakish clouds that roam the tropical skies, dropping a spray of rain on their trail, originating apparently from nowhere, bound for nowhere. We had been walking that evening in the garden fair with moonlight, and were sitting on a bench by the tennis courts. The sky was clear as far as we knew, but after a while we heard the patter of approaching rain. We heard the sound of the drops hitting in their path the verdure of the island, the roofs of the village, the gravel of the garden. It was a variation of silvery tones. By and by the leaves of the palms above us were caught, and after a little it began raining on us.

Those little showers of the tropics don't amount to much. We were wrapped in the delightful freshness, enjoying it like children. Gladys's hair, her hands, her cheeks, her beautiful eyelashes were covered by a glossy film, resplendent under the light of the moon. But, after a while, we were forced to seek shelter. I did not care to return to the glare of the hotel. "Here is a place," I said, "let's get under here."

There was, in the center of the tennis grounds, a little scaffold built for the referee during the tournament week. It was about four feet high and protected by a large canvas umbrella. I helped Gladys

up the little ladder and we stood in the center of the platform, close against the pole. I had put my arm around Gladys's waist, drawing her to me. It was fun being thus all surrounded by the rain, with just that small dry circle, within which we were enclosed. Our bodies were separated only by the stick of the umbrella, and Gladys's lips were alluringly near.

The rain of the tropics was beginning to act upon my nerves like the sun of Seaclear. But the hands of Gladys were free, and the level of the platform was four feet from the hard ground. Of a sudden I had an inspiration. On the stem of the umbrella, just above my head, was the spring that kept the umbrella open. I glided my hand along the stem and pushed the spring shut. The thing flapped upon us, catching us within. My lips were pressed to those of Gladys. She gave a little start of surprise, made a faint attempt to react under the canvas, and then stood still. All that I wanted to express to her without the intermediary of language was expressed then, and to my happy surprise she had much to convey to me in return. When the rain was over, we glided out of our funnel into the light of the moon. The sky was clear again, except for a little cloud sailing west, a cloud with a silver lining!

Gladys Gordon did not appear on the terrace of the hotel during the following morning. I was scheduled to sail back to New York the next day, but in the garden, the night before, Gladys had asked me to remain a week longer. I was very much

perplexed what to do. There was nothing that I would have loved better than staying in Nassau, but I had been away from business for over five weeks, and I felt I should go back. Moreover, at the office of the boat company they had told me that it would be quite impossible to get accommodations on the next boat or two if I waited. So I made up my mind that I would sail as originally planned.

While sitting on the porch after luncheon I saw Gladys Gordon approach, looking lovelier than ever in a large hat lined with blue satin which matched the color of her eyes. When I told her that I had decided to sail the next day, she looked at me for a minute, then she said, "Oh, you crazy idiot!"

Of all the expressions of love that I have ever heard from a girl's lips, there has never been one that touched me so deeply. It was a reproach and a confession. Evidently Gladys loved me. No one but a girl in love would say anything so sweet!

For a moment my will tottered, then I made up my mind in a positive way and told her, "Yes, I am going to sail. I am sorry, but I must." She said nothing more, but looked rather cross and walked down to the edge of the water without a word. Then I explained that if I didn't sail the next day I might have to put off my return for two or three weeks and, honestly, I couldn't do that. My brother was to go to Europe at the end of that month. I had been away now for some time and I shouldn't delay his plans. We would have all this day together and then we would see each other in town, upon her return.

At the bottom of my heart I felt that it was safer to go away now, while our little idyl was at its best. Gladys was so erratic, nobody could tell what would be her next fancy. There has always been in me an instinct to beware of joy. I love to seek it and attain it, but it has often been my experience that no sooner is it reached than it's gone.

As we strolled along the edge of the water she admitted, after all, that I was right and she rather admired me for my strength of will. But I was not going to forget her, when in town, was I? We had a charming afternoon together. Toward evening we went for a drive, along the coast, in a little buggy. She leaned her head on my shoulder with such an abandon! She had never been so sweet. On our way back we drove over to a little flower garden just outside the village to buy some roses.

It had grown quite dark by the time we reached the place. An old negro and his wife came out of the house to look for the roses through the rows of bushes. The woman carried a lantern. When she had gathered enough flowers she put the bunch in the carriage, then handing us two roses, said, "Here is one for you, Madam, and one for your husband."

Gladys was a little fluttered at the woman's remark, and drew closer to me. It was a sweet emotion for both of us to be called husband and wife by that unknown creature, in that garden of which we only felt the fragrance under the folds of the falling night.

Coming back through the village in the half light,

we pressed close to each other, inebriated by the scent of the roses, breathing the mellow air of the tropics. Along the long white streets all was whispering and soft chatting. Now and then from a doorsill came a song or a call, now and then one of those silvery laughs of the colored men that sound like the crackling of a skyrocket. I couldn't recognize Gladys. I could scarcely believe my eyes. She seemed to be a new girl, to have forgotten all her whimsical caprices.

I left her at dinner time. After dinner we met again, out in the garden. We didn't walk much this time, but we sat on the little stone wall that runs along the edge of the water. It was a calm night. Out in the bay, about five hundred yards off, a few men on a raft were moving about in the light of a torch. It seemed that a shark had been seen in the waters of the bay during the last few days, and those men were trying to catch it. They had tied the corpse of a horse to the raft and were waiting for the big fellow to come for the bait in order to hook it. Gladys expressed a desire to row over to the raft and watch the chase.

I said, "What do you care for the shark? This is our last evening, let us sit here!" I put my arm around her, I kissed her, I told her the sweetest things.

She listened and was apparently happy in my arms, but her attention was not all there. Now and then she turned and cast a look toward the raft. The moon was getting high in the sky. Little throbs

ran through the palm leaves—the tropical night was full of magic.

Abandoning my head on her shoulder, "Oh Gladys, Gladys!" I said, "I would like to dream on your shoulder forever, I wish this night would never end!" All the sentimentality of my Latin temperament was coming to the surface under that southern sky. "Oh Gladys, Gladys!" She was by my side, listening to my words, bent toward me. She, too, seemed to be lost in a reverie.

But suddenly she pushed me away and turned toward the bay. "They have caught the shark," she said.

A great commotion seemed to be taking place on the raft. The men were running about with lanterns. We could hear their voices and see them, sticking their harpoons in the water.

"Oh Lord," I said, "forget the shark!"

I was so annoyed that the blamed beast should thus interrupt our bliss! "What do you care about the old shark?" I said to her. "Leave him alone! Come back here!"

She had jumped down the ledge.

"I want to go and see," she said. "Let us go!"

"What's the idea?" I said. "We can't go out there now, we don't want to go."

"Yes, I want to, come on, come on," and she pulled me by the hand. She seemed to have forgotten altogether our love and our recent bliss, overcome by this new freak of her erratic mind.

I followed her to the pier. "But," I said, "it is

silly. We can't go out this way, I don't see any row-boat."

She was looking down in the water. "There are some launches here," she said. "Let us take one." She crawled from one boat into another to a little green launch which was moored a few feet off. I said, "I don't know how to run a launch, I have never tried."

"If you don't, I do," she said. "Come in!" and she helped me in. We looked for the crank. We had some difficulty in finding it and I was beginning to have a hope that it wouldn't be there. Finally we discovered it under a seat.

"Here it is," she said, and started cranking the motor.

"Let me do it!" said I, standing next to her. But she had already given the twist. All of a sudden the motor started off. We felt a terrific jolt and a snap. We had forgotten to untie the rope that fastened the boat to the mooring. It snapped and the boat turned over, throwing both of us into the water.

When Gladys picked me up and deposited me next to her on the pier, dripping like a sponge, I pushed her aside and told her: "Go away! Never again! Never again!"

I was through!

XX

THE LINE

When the war broke out between Italy and Austria, I was called to the colors in the Italian army, where I served for three years. I have often felt the temptation to present some episodes of those days. It is a thorn in my heart to see how little recognition Italy is given for what her sons have accomplished, and it would be my greatest pride to bring the magnificent truth to light. It ought to be done, for the sake of those five hundred thousand men who are dead among our mountains, and of those many more who withstood there the greatest passion ever endured by human beings on earth. But who will give me the authority to do it in this personal account of my life? My part in the war was too small —only those made worthy by a holocaust of blood should have the right to claim recognition for themselves and their brothers. Still, I cannot pass in silence those years, compared to which all the rest of my life seems barren and trivial. The few episodes which I will relate are of such human interest by themselves that I feel justified in reporting them.

I had been in the army only a few months when I was sent to the Carso plateau, at a point between

Ronchi and Monfalcone, on the eastern end of the line. I arrived there late one evening, and I had a certain amount of trouble locating the place where I was to be lodged.

I was inexperienced and timid in those days. I had been made a second lieutenant of the engineers almost point blank, on account of my college degree, but I had little knowledge of military matters. The command of a squad of men and a section of electric reflectors was to be assigned me. I didn't know the first thing about what I was expected to do. I was scared to death!

During the trip over, I had confided my anxiety to a fellow officer who had told me: "Don't worry! Nobody knows what he is expected to do. Your soldiers will teach you." He was right—our soldiers, our little soldiers, are the ones that taught us how to make war, how to win the war! In the German army it was Von Hindenburg who won the battles, Von Falkenhayn, or Von Mackensen. On the Italian front it was the Brigata Sassari, the first regiment of Grenadiers, the white Lancers of Novara. It is still a matter of astonishment to me to think how those men, peasants of the plains, rough mountaineers, fishermen of the sea, got into the spirit of the undertaking and developed at their task the most manly and intelligent faculties.

That first night, after trying to get information about what I should do from three or four officers who were too busy or too lazy to help me, I caught sight of a corporal, consuming his ration all alone

on a bench in front of the dismantled house where I was to be lodged. Straightening myself up, in the manner of an officer addressing his inferior, I commanded him, "Corporal, come here!"

He left his pail and stood on the "*attenti*" before me. I showed him my slip and said: "This must be the place where I have to sleep. Do you know where I will find my bed?"

He recognized me for a greenhorn, right away, but did not change his respectful attitude. "*Signor tenente*," he answered, "if you permit me, I will find it out in a minute at that little house over there." He took my slip and ran over to a hut in a field about five hundred yards off, and, in a while, he was back with the information.

He led me up a rickety pair of stairs to a room on the top floor of the house. One of the outer walls was off and had been replaced with boards. There were two cots. The corporal pointed out mine to me. "You will be alone most of the time," he said, "the other cot belongs to the doctor, and he always sleeps down in the fife-house."

I was going to ask what the "fife-house" was, then I figured it out by myself. *Fifa*, in Italian slang, means the feeling that overcomes one, when he is utterly deserted by his nerve. The fife-house was down stairs, a part of the cellar, protected by a cement ceiling and sandbags. I had occasion to patronize it myself later on, but that first night, I was too proud even to think of it.

The doctor happened to drop in, in the mean-

time, looking for some of his things. He was a captain. We exchanged courtesies and greetings, in military fashion.

"I see that you have the enthusiasm of the neophyte," he said. "I sleep down in the fife-house, having been at this game long enough to forget pride for safety! This war reminds me of married life. The first nights one has all sorts of ambitions; then, little by little, one goes back to premarriage sleeps and the more comfort one can get, the better. Good luck, young man!" and he walked down, carrying a blanket under his arm.

I asked the corporal, "Is this house under fire?" "Yes," he said, "but it isn't hit very often. We don't get a shell a month." I didn't like to inquire when it had been hit last, but I asked, "How far is the line?" He said, "About four miles, do you want to see it?"

In the intervals of our conversation we could hear quite distinctly now and then the rumble of the guns, also a crackling noise far away.

It had grown dark. From time to time, through the cracks between board and board, strange lights seemed to appear and disappear.

I said, "Yes, I'd like to see the line."

I had no idea of what he meant to show me. Was he going to take me to the trenches? Should I put my helmet on?

"If you follow me up this staircase," he said, "I will show you."

We went out to the little hall, and from there we

climbed two short flights to the attic. He helped me lift myself up on the main beam of the roof.

"Remove the two tiles at your right side," he said. So I did and stuck my face against the hole.

The breeze of the Carso blew against my forehead, carrying to my nostrils a scent of lands and a smell of powder. Far off eight or ten shafts of light searched the sky and the lands—one of them seemed to be very bright and powerful.

"It's the reflector of the Hermada," the corporal said. But I was all taken by the new sight I was discovering. Just about two hundred yards from where I was standing, the ground rose sharply to an elevation of perhaps fifty feet and then gradually to a series of little undulations—the Hermada on the south, and to the east the barren hills of Castagnevizza and Temnizza. Little by little, through the darkness, I could detect the trend of the line by the flashes along it, and by the bengal lights that went up now and then, and came down again, slowly. It was just a vague trace, very indistinct, among the irregularities of the highlands, but the emotions that came to me from that sight were beyond any that had ever gripped my heart before.

The line! For the first time I realized what that word meant. There before me, four miles off, was the fatal limit, beyond which the law of Christ was not to apply! On this side we were; on the other side was "the enemy." It was our task and our duty to kill them, to destroy them, to starve their women and children. No love for them—hate!

Hate! I repeated the word to myself, trying to evoke the corresponding feeling, but to my astonishment I found that I could not. It occurred to me then, for the first time, that I had never hated anybody in my life. Appealing to my imagination, I endeavored to concentrate my thoughts upon "the enemy" and stir up hate against them.

I had never met an Austrian, had never known their language, never read an Austrian book. Beyond the line was their land. Under the rising moon the barren extent of the Carso was emerging out of the night fantastic, and I could imagine hills and plains spreading beyond it, mountains and dales, Central Europe, a whole world! And that world was separated from ours by that tiny line, which here and there could be detected amongst the irregularities of the ground. It started just a few miles down, from the marshes of Monfalcone, and it ran across the Carso, then up the Isonzo River. It climbed the slopes of Monte Nero, then passed from crest to crest, across valleys and over mountain passes, to the glaciers of the Ortler, on the Swiss boundary. Then on the other side of Switzerland up to the sea it ran for hundreds of miles, separating one world from the other, separating us, the defenders of the just cause, from the Huns, the barbarians, those who had put themselves beyond the pale of love. We were clashing along that line to decide by murder and destruction what were to be the destinies of future generations. Either we would tighten it around our enemies and choke them within the ring of our

guns, or they would break through, overrun our countries, overrun the world, and enslave it.

Something like this I was telling myself, trying to arouse hate in my heart, but my feelings did not go that way at all! The vague trend of the line over there, with its lights appearing and disappearing, seemed to lead my thoughts into the infinite. The wind carried now a scent of fields and grass, similar to the scent of our plain at home, when Bianca Maria sat by the window of our room, waiting for us to fall asleep. All the tenderness of those days was brought back to me by that light scent of the fields. And I thought of the nights when she, Bianca Maria, after we children had had a quarrel, used to put us to bed and then come back and lift her lamp to watch us sleeping on one another's arms. Quarrels of children—wars of men! What are they on this earth? What are they in the tacit, endless flow of time? I lifted my eyes to the sky. It was all blue. No line there! In the even serenity the stars were glimmering over our land and the lands across. The sublime Night, the sister of all, held her lamp above the dead of both sides—above those who were to die next.

The little corporal was still there, and I told him to go, without turning my face, lest he should know that there were tears in my eyes at the thought of what that line meant!

XXI

THE END OF A PERFECT DAY

I MUST admit that I started my career as a warrior in a very peculiar way and the next morning I realized that if I couldn't do better than that, I might end my life standing against a white wall as a target for a squad of our best fusileers. I decided, therefore, to control my emotions and get at my task like a real man.

The rest of the officers who lodged in the house were having a summary breakfast in a barn across the way. I joined them. They made room for me at the mess table and posted me about the situation. There was going to be a hand-bomb throwing contest that day, between the infantry of our division and that of the next. I had better go with them and see it.

I said I had to report immediately for instruction at the command of my group.

"Don't be in a hurry," one of them said. "Wait a day or two, the war is not going to end to-morrow. You will have plenty of time to fool around with your reflectors. They are of no earthly use to anybody, anyhow!"

But I insisted. My slip read that I should report that day, and I was afraid I would get into trouble if I

disobeyed. So I walked to the hut where the command was located and presented my credentials to the Major.

"You are the new officer," he said. "All right! We will have to find something for you to do. Sit down there."

He was pretty busy. Once or twice he walked out to the office of the Commander of division a few yards off. Every time he passed by me he said, "Oh, the new officer! I will attend to you in a minute."

I sat there for about two hours. Finally he came to me and said: "Why don't you come back to-morrow? To-day is Sunday. You had better go and see the matches at Fogliano. I will see you in the morning."

Everybody seemed to be going to see the matches. I said to myself, "What about the war?" The guns were thundering along the line, but nobody seemed to be any less happy for it. On the road between Ronchi and Fogliano everybody was walking merrily toward the field where the matches were held. It was situated in a little nook, inclosed between two spurs of the Carso highlands, and there they had dug two trenches. From one of them, at a given signal, squads of soldiers of the two divisions in turn ran out and threw hand-bombs at some wooden dummies set in the other trench. It was fine sport and not without danger. Now and then a fellow missed his throw and a bomb burst in the open ground, wounding some of the men.

The high officers of the two divisions were there. I also saw one of the lieutenants with whom I had

breakfasted that morning. I joined him. He explained the game to me and also gave me an idea of the place. We were only about six miles from the line, but we were well protected by the heights of Collenero and Monte Sei Busi.

It was a fine day, very clear and bright. To my astonishment, I noticed above us three or four little white clouds that seemed to appear and fade out very quickly. I called the attention of my companion to them. He looked at me, from head to foot, as though he wanted to make sure that I was all there, and then he said, "Say, you American landlubber, if you don't know the difference between a cloud and a bursting shell, you had better pack up your grip and go back to New York."

"Oh," I said, "they are shells, are they? And what are they shooting at the sky for?"

But before he had time to answer I had caught sight of two aeroplanes flying above us way up in the air. Evidently they had discovered us, because they began coming down in our direction. In a moment all was excitement in the field. The soldiers had stopped their games. Everybody was looking at the sky. A platoon of men who had muskets pointed them towards the planes. Down they came in circles, the little white clouds bursting around them from all directions. When they got to about one thousand feet from us, three or four of our machine guns, hidden in the highlands, began firing on them. The planes dropped a bomb here and there, but not quite near enough to hit anybody. They seemed to be afraid to come too

low, as the shells around them were now bursting pretty thickly.

Of a sudden, a little monoplane from our side was seen flying across the sky towards them. It flew straight to one of the machines and began shooting. Before we had time to realize it, the enemy pilot must have been hit. He swung right and left three or four times, then he let the machine come down aimlessly. It passed above our heads about three hundred feet, and then it swooped to the ground a few miles off.

Everybody started running across the fields in the direction the machine had landed. I ran with the rest, following my friend. When we got to the road, we saw two soldiers on bicycles bound for the scene of the disaster. My companion stopped them.

"Where are you going?" he asked. They tried to make up a story of some message they had to carry, but my friend told them: "Get down and give us the bicycles. You can call for them, this afternoon, at the mass quarters of the brigate Alpi, in Ronchi." The poor devils could do nothing but say, "*Signor si!*" We took the bicycles and they went on foot. So we were among the first to get to the scene of the fall.

The machine had capsized. There were two men on the ground. One was dead and the other seemed to be badly hurt. We dug him out from under the débris, laid him on the grass, and tore his clothes open. His whole chest was covered with a thin veil of blood, which must have been squeezed out of his pores by the blow against the earth. Poor devil! He

was young and handsome, and seemed to suffer terribly. I couldn't understand his words, as he spoke German, but it appeared that he was only twenty-two and he didn't want to die. No one could blame him for not wanting to die—twenty-two years old and as handsome as he was! It must have been tough for him, lying flat on his back, with all his bones broken, his eyes full of blood, while the sun was shining so brightly overhead! Yet he had no choice. He had to die there with nobody around but enemy soldiers, watching him die as one watches a mad dog hit by a blow, kicking his last on the ground. Though he was an Austrian I felt sorry for him.

It was a perfect day. The soldiers had caught sight of a hare running across the fields and had started off on a chase. The guns were thundering. Above our head, the companions of the dead men were planing in circles amidst the white puffs of smoke. It was a glorious scene of life and sport, in which the two dead bodies put a tragic note.

We were laying them on a stretcher when a soldier noticed a little silver cross that one of the men was wearing on his chest.

"He is a Christian like us," he said, "let us say a prayer for him," and he knelt down. Others followed and they recited a prayer for the dead enemy—one of those rude prayers of the Abruzzi, full of the mystic spirit of that land where the memory of the saints is still alive.

In the afternoon, perhaps for reprisal, the Austrians started shelling our village. They threw over

fifteen shells. One hit the hospital and killed six men.

That evening I was walking along the road with my friend, trying to fathom the mystery of the day. It had been a grand Sunday, full of excitement! Eight men had been slain in the flower of youth! I thought of them—I also thought of the parents of the two aviators who would learn of their fall, with no details, and who would be waiting, Lord knows how long, for them to come back, as the father of one of my friends did, who still waited for his son, drowned six months before in the sea.

I mentioned these fine sentiments to my companion, and he said: "Don't worry about somebody else's parents; nobody knows whom our parents will be waiting for, some day!"

I felt rather flat for being so unsophisticated and stopped talking. I stopped talking, but I kept on thinking. War—what a game! Played under the sun, under the stars, in the dust, in the mud, over the ice, on the sea, and above the clouds—what a game! One unseen player is everywhere, on the earth, in the sky, on the sea—ever present, ever ready, ever winning—Death!

XXII

THE TEMPTATION

About the middle of 1917 I became very tired of the war—not exactly of the war, but of the part I was playing in it. When I had left New York, answering the call, I saw ahead of me the prospect of great deeds to be performed. I was afraid that the war would not last long enough to give me the opportunity of demonstrating my bravery. On the contrary, now, the war was lasting and lasting, with no sign of coming to an end, and I was still the most obscure man in the Allied armies.

I had been attached to the searchlight service and went out every night at the head of a platoon, with an electric reflector set on a truck, for the purpose of throwing light on the enemy's lines. We set our light in position and maneuvered it from some sheltered place, by the means of a cable about five hundred feet long. It was the most thankless job that ever kept human beings busy. Night after night we went out, without, as far as I know, ever getting any results. We were supposed to work in connection with the artillery, or, better, the artillery was supposed to work in connection with us, firing any time we detected a movement on the enemy's part. But we never de-

tected anything at all. There was no satisfaction in that service—no glory, either. To my knowledge, nobody ever got killed, but an officer who went to sleep one night on the way to his post, and fell under the wheels of his truck.

For about six months I attended to this fruitless task on the Carso line, and then I was removed to Val d'Astico in the Venetian Alps, to a similar service. If anything, this second job was worse than the first. This time I had not even a truck at my command, only a mule, for we were way up on the crest of a mountain, where no truck could reach. When night came, we loaded the old mule with the reflector and went to set it somewhere, flush with the top ridge. We could thus throw light on the mountain across, where the enemy's positions were located. But there also nothing ever happened. Two or three times we had the excitement of seeing a few men on a trail, but as soon as they were caught in the light of our reflector they disbanded and disappeared in the woods. Our artillery fired a few hundred shots at random, then all was quiet again. The only ascertained damage that we ever did to the enemy was to bring about the death of one of their mules, which was blinded one night by our shaft of light and, missing her step, tumbled down a ravine.

I was getting impatient and bored. On the Carso, at least, we were in contact with the rest of the troops. There were changes of brigades, we got the newspapers, and we knew what was going on along the line. Here we were isolated for weeks. Every now and then

a *corvée* came up from the valley, to bring a supply of oil and food, otherwise the only connection we had with the world was the telephone between us and headquarters, and we had no ambition to use it—the less it rang, the better.

My men were camped in a wooden barrack, together with the mule. I was lodged with another officer in the artillery observatory, a small stone construction built so that the roof projected a little above the top line of the mountain. Through a hole in it one could see the other side of the valley. My friend spent most of his time with his eye stuck to that hole, never discouraged, doing his duty with the patience of a Syrian monk. I admired him a great deal, but couldn't help expressing my utter disgust for our thankless task.

He was a philosopher. "Don't kick," he said. "If this is what they require of us, let us do it with a glad heart!" He had the proper spirit to be sure, and I endeavored to emulate him, but some days I felt so discouraged that I thought I could stand it no longer. I wished for a shell to put an end to my misery. For several months I had been without a furlough and my next one was not due for some time.

Once or twice I had telephoned down to my command reporting some imaginary trouble with the searchlight, so as to get a chance to go down to Cogollo, where I could at least meet a few human beings. But I got little fun out of those excursions. I had to report to my major, I had to pretend, I had to do a lot of brain work to justify my visit. Then

Cogollo didn't satisfy me much. There was nothing in the place but soldiers and officers. My ambition was Vicenza, where they had stores and cafés and ladies. Vicenza, about thirty miles down in the plain, exerted a fascination on my fancy like Paris, or Rome, or Cairo, or any wonderful city of dreams.

As a matter of fact, Vicenza was rather a poor place in those days, crowded with troops, with all the colonels and generals of the first army infesting the town. Still, it appeared wonderful, compared to where we were. One night we had serious trouble with our reflector. We couldn't make it work. Some part of the motor had gone wrong. I called up my major the next morning and reported the matter, suggesting that I should be allowed to go to Vicenza and have the piece repaired. He remarked that I might send my sergeant, but I insisted, saying that it was a delicate piece of work and I had better go myself to make sure that it was done properly. I went down to Cogollo and he gave me the permit for Vicenza; also he allowed me to make use of a motor cycle which belonged to the command of our group.

I started off merrily, but after a few miles, the blamed thing began to miss. By the time I got to Thiene it was stuck dead. In Thiene there was located the command of the Tenth Army Corps. I knew an officer there, and I thought that, rather than wait for my motor cycle to be repaired, I would ask him to attend to the task, and I would jump on a truck going to Vicenza.

There was generally a great movement of automo-

biles and trucks on the road, but just at that moment none seemed to be available. My friend advised me to go to the office of the command at Palazzo Colleoni and find out there. The officers of the command were going back and forth all the time.

In the court of the Palazzo there was only one car, and I inquired of the sergeant who had charge of it, what it was there for. It came from Vicenza and it had brought a colonel of the General Staff, who was at present inside the Palazzo.

I asked the sergeant, "Do you know who the Colonel is?" He didn't know, but it seemed that he was an officer from the war office in Rome on a visit of inspection.

"How does he look?" I asked.

"He looks like a regular colonel," he answered.

I said, "Do you think I could ask him to let me get in the car when he goes back to Vicenza?"

Before the sergeant had time to answer, the Colonel appeared at the door of the ground floor. I walked over to him and respectfully presented my case, asking permission to get in the front of the car by the side of the chauffeur. He looked at me through his monocle, and said, "May I see your permit sheet?" I produced the document. He looked it over and handing it back to me said, "All right, you may." Then he entered the car himself. As I was climbing to the front seat, he said, "One moment—come in here with me; you will keep me company on the way."

He was rather agreeable and during the trip he

talked to me. He also inquired about my rôle in the war and my profession in civil life. When he heard I had come from America he was quite interested and asked me a number of questions about the country in general, and New York in particular. He was a nobleman from Rome. Some of his relatives had married American girls. He also knew some of my Turin friends, having begun his career there at the military academy. He was only a few years older than I. When we got to Vicenza, he shook hands with me before dropping me out. I went to the artillery shops for my repairs.

The same night I saw him again, in the dining room of the hotel. He was sitting there in the company of a lady. Nobody else was in the place. I saluted as I entered and went to sit at a table on the opposite side of the room. I wanted to treat myself to a full-fledged dinner, but I had to comply with the food regulations and be contented with a fair supper. I told the waiter: "My friend, you will have to make up with the wine. I want you to dig out the very best bottle you have in your cellar." He produced a bottle of Bardolino that was indeed a marvel. During the dinner, I noticed that the Colonel's companion looked in my direction quite often. She spoke to him, then she held up her lorgnette, and surveyed me in a way that I thought was rather impertinent. I supposed that she must be the wife of the Colonel and must have considered it her privilege to look at a lieutenant in any way she pleased. I had disposed of my supper, and was slowly finishing my bottle of wine, when

the Colonel got up and, walking over to me, said, "Lieutenant, I would like you to meet Donna Clara Mattini, my wife."

I went over and was introduced. She offered me her hand to kiss. The Colonel bade me sit down, then he looked at his wrist watch. "You will have to excuse me for a few minutes," he said. "I want to go over to the mess quarters of the first army, before the officers leave. I have to speak to the General." Taking his cape and hat, he went off.

I sat down next to the lady, who again looked at me through her lorgnette as though I was an objecet of great curiosity.

"So you are Lieutenant Landi!" she said. "Carletto Landi!" and kept on surveying me.

"Well," I said, "apparently you have heard my name before."

"I certainly have," she said. "I have heard a great deal about you."

I declared myself most flattered at the idea, and asked whether I could know who the friend was who had spoken to her of me."

"I don't think it should be difficult for you to guess," she said.

I stopped to think for a minute. She was living in Rome. Was there anyone in Rome who would be apt to speak of me to her?

I looked into her eyes for a minute; then I said, "How is she?" We had not mentioned any name.

She smiled and then answered: "She is well and is as beautiful as ever. She is my best friend."

Reginella had been living in Rome since her marriage, six or eight years before. I had never heard from her and did not know her husband; in fact, I hardly knew his name. I had heard that he was an elderly man, a count, and a chamberlain of the Pope.

"She is as beautiful as ever," I said slowly. "Is she happy?"

Donna Clara looked into my eyes for a while and then said, "I don't know."

She appeared scarcely to be answering my question, but rather turning a thought over in her mind, as she leaned back in her chair. We had met only a few minutes before, but we felt as though we had known each other for a long time.

"Oh, Donna Clara," I said, "you are her best friend. You should know whether she is happy or not. Does she remember me?"

Donna Clara did not answer for a while. She was looking at me with a bland smile. "Have you forgotten her?" she asked.

"I have not," I said. "I have not, indeed!"

Then I asked, "Do you think she would want to see me again?"

"I don't know whether she would want to, but I think she may like to."

"Did you ever ask her?" I asked.

"I did," she said.

"What did she tell you?"

"She said it may be better not, for everybody's sake."

"How is that?"

"She may be afraid of what might happen."

I asked, "Is that what she said?"

Donna Clara answered, "Yes."

I sat silent for a few minutes. I thought of Reginella in Rome, of her elderly husband, of the pine-clad hills, of the golden skies, and of what might happen there.

Donna Clara was examining me, not with her lorgnette this time, but with a friendly look, almost tender. She put her hand on my wrist. "Carletto Landi," she said, "do you still love her?"

I said, "Yes. I have loved her all these years, I still love her!"

She asked, "Would you like to see her?"

I said, "How can I?"

She hesitated for a minute, then she said, "I may arrange it for you."

I said: "It can't be done! I am going back to my post to-night. It will be several months before I get a furlough."

She replied: "What are you doing up on those mountains? Is it very important?"

I thought of my mule up there and my dozen men. It was not brilliant, to be sure; still, it was my post!

I answered in a general way, "It is not important, but I am contributing there my little share to the great task."

"Don't you think you could contribute as well from somewhere else?" she asked.

I replied, "What do you mean?"

She said: "It seems to me a great pity that you

should be held up on those mountains on an obscure task. You are a bright officer, you can speak English, you have traveled a great deal. I am sure they could use you in Rome to much better advantage." She was looking at me now, with a roguish air. The spirit of temptation that lies at the bottom of every woman's soul was shining in her eyes. "Do you want to?" she asked. "Do you want to?"

"I can arrange it for you," she went on. "My husband has great influence in Rome. He is at the war office and he knows every general there. He can see that you are called there for some service. We are going back to-morrow. Let me speak to him. I know that you have made a very good impression on him."

"Oh no," I said. "Oh no! It's impossible!" I was completely disconcerted at her proposition. I had taken my head in my hands and, leaning over the table, was for a moment entirely overwhelmed by a strange emotion. All the memories of my youth seemed to be rushing back to me.

"I have a house," Donna Clara said, "with a large garden. Reginella visits me very often. At times, if I am not at home, she walks in the garden all by herself. From our terrace one has a view of the Campagna. In one corner of the garden, among the boxwood, there is a statue. On a bench close by she sits sometimes, for a long while. How would she feel if you should suddenly appear by her side?"

The vision rose so vividly before my eyes: The garden and the terrace, and a statue mid the green.

Was it yesterday? Was it yesterday? Fifteen years of my life, my sojourn in America, her marriage, the war, the most momentous events of human history—what did they amount to? One word and one vision, and they were swept from my memory. It was yesterday that she had sat with me in the great park. Nothing had happened, nothing had happened since! She was waiting for me in the garden. We could pick up the broken end and neither she nor I would ever remember that it had been broken at all. Reginella!

"Do you want to? Do you want to?" the voice repeated.

I made the gesture of shoving Donna Clara aside. "Let me alone! Let me alone!"

But she whispered in my ear: "I live in Villa Mattini, at Porta S. Giovanni. If you need me, write me there."

Her husband had appeared at that moment on the threshold of the door.

I sat down a few minutes longer with the Colonel and his wife, then I begged permission to leave and started back for my post. I had made arrangements for a truck to take me back to Thiene, where I would find my motor cycle. I sat in front with the driver. I wanted to get the fresh air of the night. It was only about nine o'clock and I might have stayed in Vicenza an hour or two longer, but I didn't care. I had lost interest in the place. I felt restless. I wanted to be off. I wanted to be back with my mule and my

men. I was afraid of that tempting voice which still rang in my ear. While running along the dark road, I could hear it whispering, "Do you want to? Do you want to?" I could see Rome—the vision of the great garden where at times Reginella sat alone with her memories. If I only could go and sit beside her in the enclosure of boxwood! Everything would be as in times past, as in the days of our love! Was it possible? Was it possible? The Basilica of San Giovanni with its statues on the top, seen through the foliage, would give us the illusion of the great villa on our hills. The sight of the Campagna would be like the view of our plain, and we could rebuild there our dreams. We would forget the disconsolate misery of those fifteen years of silence, and renew the days of our youth. I had seen her then walking across the meadow, like a divine virgin. I would see her now, a woman, in those magnificent settings that only Rome can give. Under the golden sun I pictured her stepping down the staircase of Trinita dei Monti mid a glory of roses. I could imagine, behind her, the steps of Santa Maria Maggiore, the arches of the Forum, the pines of the Palatine. I could imagine Via Veneto going up hill, and Palazzo di Piombino, and the corner of Via Ludovisi. Life is worth living there—walking alongside the walls of the gardens of the Queen, breathing the scent of the roses, and, at the turn of a corner, seeing the outlines appear of the woman beloved!

"Go faster, go faster!" I kept on crying to the driver. I wanted to escape the vision. I couldn't get

back to my post quick enough. In Thiene I found my motor cycle in order, I rushed top speed all the way to Cogollo, then I started right off for the mountains. It seemed to me that on top of that mountain, at my post, I would find salvation.

But climbing up the trail, in the night, the terrific temptation overwhelmed me once more. Once or twice I fell down on the ground, and I lay flat, helpless, tearing chunks of grass with my hands, while the voice kept whispering in my ears, "Do you want to? Do you want to?"

No, no, no! I didn't want to. I wanted to go back to my post, to my men! For the first time, my humble work assumed, in my fancy, the semblance of a noble duty. While the war lasted my place was there, not in Rome; it was among those rocks, not in the arms of a woman. No matter how useless, no matter how fruitless my task, it was a man's task—it was the task that was required of me. I was afraid that I might yield to the temptation. The woman had said: "I live in Villa Mattini, at Porta San Giovanni. If you need me, write me there." Why, why had she put that idea in my mind? I wished I could forget her name, have her address blotted out of my mind. I knew how much that recollection would torment me up there, in those long hours of idleness, in those moments of moral distress.

The nearer I got to my post, the more I realized how wretchedly cheerless it was. I was utterly weary; at each step I felt as though I was pulling a load up the mountain. With a painful effort, I crawled up

the last few hundred feet, and when I reached my post I was exhausted.

It was very late in the night and my friend was asleep in his cot. I got quietly into mine and lay still, my eyes wide open in the dark. I felt cold. I must have perspired, coming up the mountain. Now the dampness of the place chilled me through. I got up to reach for a blanket on a shelf above my friend's bed. He woke up. "Are you there?" he asked. I said, "Yes, it is I. I am getting a blanket, I feel cold."

Then I went back to bed and tried again to sleep. But I couldn't keep my eyes closed. I felt so thoroughly miserable. Wouldn't the war ever end? Was I to spend the rest of my life among those rocks? What was I doing there, anyhow? Was there any sense in keeping me at that useless task? I felt bitter against our generals, against the war, against everybody and everything. Why should all the burden and discomfort be thrown on us, while elsewhere many were having an easy time? I thought of the Colonel coming up for a tour of inspection and taking his wife along, as to a show, then returning to Rome. They were having a good time in Rome. Garden parties, five o'clock teas—for the benefit of the soldiers, naturally. Why shouldn't I have the right to be there, as well as anybody else? Why shouldn't I have the right of taking away Reginella from that husband of no account, the chamberlain of the Pope? It was war time. Let everybody make his own law. Was it just that one should have all the worst part and the

others the best? Why scruples? Here was the chance of straightening things according to our own idea of justice.

I was repeating these rash things to myself, trying to make myself believe them—but, at the bottom of my heart, I knew well enough what was right and what was wrong. I knew that I was going to stay right there at my post, with the added misery of that temptation to make my days more bitter.

I tried to go to sleep. The early dawn was now throwing her pale light over the mountains. How cold it was in that miserable hut! I couldn't help thinking of the balmy nights of Rome. I couldn't shake off the chill in my bones. Again I got up for another blanket.

"What are you doing?" my friend said, turning around in his bed.

"I still feel cold," I said.

He looked at me saying, "Aren't you well?"

Getting up, he went mechanically to his hole, as he did the first thing every morning, and looked outside for a while. Then he came back.

"You are restless," he said. "What's the trouble?" I was sitting now on the edge of my bed, holding my head in my hands.

"I feel miserable," I said. "I am disgusted with life." Then I started my tale. I had never spoken to him of Reginella before. I told him of her, of our love out in the mountains, of our separation on the hills of Turin, of ten years of arid, loveless life. Reginella had been my lost love. Now this woman had

come to tell me that she was still mine. In a garden of Rome I could find her and could exchange for her this miserable place, these bare rocks, my tedious work.

He had lit his pipe and sat listening to me. The day was rising. He opened the door. We could see the range of peaks glittering in the sun. He let me finish. When I got through with my tale, he walked over to me and, tapping me on the shoulder, said: "Carletto, your story is fine, but you will stick to this job. It's greater than all that!"

XXIII

CLAUDIO GRAZIANI

ANY ONE who has had a part, be it ever so small, in some unknown tragedy, carries the whole tragedy within him and is haunted forever by the desire to make it known to people, to make people feel what once struck his heart and the memory of which now and then strikes his mind with the full force of a present reality. Hardly he needs to know how to tell or how to write. The tale itself will come from his lips or from his pen some day, when some event, scarcely related to the facts, suddenly forces out the terrible image.

I have had this feeling, right along, ever since I came back from the war. Then, a few nights ago, while walking home from the theater, after seeing one of the so-called war plays, more than ever I felt that I had something within myself that I wanted to tell. Of a hundred episodes in which I had had a part during the last three years, some one I should render in a forcible way, to convey the tragic aspect of war as I have seen it. I thought of episodes of glory, of shame, of terror, of fear, of character.

Suddenly from my memory a figure arose of a boy, blond and tall, handsome as a god, with a scar on

his forehead, and I knew that no other story should I ever tell but his, the story of my friend, Claudio Graziani.

I had known that boy, Claudio Graziani, ever since he was born, he being the younger brother of an intimate friend of mine. The most vivid recollection that I had, though, was of him when he was ten or twelve years of age, this time corresponding to the last years of my stay in Italy before I came to America.

His family lived in Turin during the winter, but early in the spring they moved to a village on the hills, just outside the city, and there I used to visit them during the Easter vacations. His brother and I were of the same class at college. We were supposed, during that period of holidays, to be busy catching up with our studies, so sadly neglected during the Carnival and Lenten seasons.

With our books we used to sit outside the house on a large terrace overlooking the plain. Below us was the city in a haze of mist. In front of us the chain of the Alps, like a great white wall, encircled the horizon. He who has not seen our landscapes in the spring can hardly conceive the feeling that we who have lived there carry ever in our hearts. The city lies astride of the Po, just at the foot of the hills, and beyond is the great plain, all green in April, with towns here and there, with streams and clusters of trees in blossoms. In the distance is the great white wall of the mountains. At sunset the whole sky, back

of the mountains, glows like a blaze. Against the scarlet glare the peaks throw reflections of steel and crystal.

Just below the terrace where we sat, my friend and I, was a peach orchard, all in bloom at that season; delicate clouds of pink blossom waving softly in the spring breeze. The boy Claudio made of that orchard his playground. We used to see him from our belvedere, climbing the trees, picking clusters of blossoms, chasing the peacocks around the place. Now and then, from a window of the house above came the voice of his mother, when he took a chance, sitting on a branch or walking on the edge of the wall.

"Claudio, look out!"

He raised his eyes, a handsome boy, blond among all that pink, with the sun shining on his head. That's why I always think of him as a child, there among his trees in the light of the sun, with our plain behind him and the Alps in the background. I lost track of him for a long time. I hardly thought of him once or twice during the ten years I was in America. When I got back to Italy for the war, I heard incidentally that he had joined the colors a few months before and was now a lieutenant of the Alpini. Once or twice I heard of him again, through some friend, or through his brother whom I met once at the front.

Now in the fall of last year, about the end of September, I received orders to report with a platoon of my men at Edolo in Val Camonica, at the headquarters of the ——— division. When I got there, they assigned me to a place by the Tonal Pass, where, with

my men, I was to do some repairs to a cable line and build a new line of barbed wire entanglements. I was new to that section. After getting my order, I went to the billeting station to find out what accommodations I would get up there for myself and my men. The officer in charge, a lieutenant of the Alpini disabled from active service, after consulting his maps and books scribbled on a slip and handed it to me.

"Here you are," he said. "You will have a fine shelter for your men and a good place for yourself."

"Am I going to be alone?" I asked.

"No, there is another man in the place."

"What is he?"

"A captain of the Arditi."

"Good Lord!" I said. "Have a heart! Don't put me with a captain of the Arditi. You know how they are. There is nobody but the Arditi according to them that does anything in this war. That fellow is going to make my life miserable."

My friend laughed.

The Arditi of the Italian Army are the pick of the best regiments—mostly volunteers. They do not stay in the trenches, but are held back of the line and are just sent up at the last minute to replace the infantry for the attack. They must take the position or get killed. Once the position is taken, they are withdrawn, and again the infantry is put in their place to hold. It's a soft job when things are quiet, but a risky business when they go out. They don't use rifles, only hand-bombs and poignards. They do not take prisoners. They kill—kill or are killed—no middle

course. If they fall into the hands of the Austrians, they'll be torn to shreds, so hated are they! No quarter, no mercy on either side. They are the cruelest soldiers that this war produced, but the most effective tools in the hands of a good leader, fighting the good fight of the olden times. None of this dirty gas business of nowadays.

We all admired them a great deal in the army, but we preferred to keep at a distance from them. They are bad on the enemy, but they are pretty rough with their friends, too. They play tricks on you as the cowboys out West play on the Eastern tenderfoot. They tickle you with their poignards, and would think nothing of hitting you on the head with a club as a joke. Naturally, according to their idea, everybody is an *imboscato* in the army but they. (*Imboscato* is the Italian term for shirker.) Their soldiers pay no attention to you if you are not one of their own officers. They are great boys, to be sure, but at times they get on your nerves! That's why I, a poor lieutenant of the Engineers, did not at all like the idea of sharing my home with one of them.

Again I said: "Can't you fix me some other way? I'd rather not be put with this fellow of the Arditi."

"Don't worry," he told me. "He is all right. He is the nicest boy you ever met; used to be a lieutenant in my regiment before he went into the Arditi. He is a Piedmontese like you."

I wanted to ask his name, but a colonel entered and my friend turned around to attend to him. Picking

up my slip, I walked out to get my men in shape and take them up to the post assigned to us.

I had three trucks for my men and the implements. It was getting late in the evening. I thought we had better start right away, so as to get to the place between eight and nine. I knew that the last part of the road was under range of the enemy's fire, and, though screened, it was better to take no chances traveling on it with three trucks after the moon was out.

We got there a little after eight. The quarters for my men were on a field just off the road, protected from the enemy's fire by a rocky spur of the mountain.

It didn't take long to get the men and the stuff out of the trucks. I got them fixed, stored the implements, and left everything in the care of my two sergeants, while I walked to my quarters, a few hundred feet beyond, followed by my orderly who carried the little case with my belongings. I had been directed to a wooden shelter built against the side of the rock. A couple of other shelters of the same kind were alongside of it. From each of the three stuck out a pipe from which rose a faint line of smoke. There was no other sign of life.

I walked to the door and knocked. A voice from inside said, "Who is there?" And at the same time, the door opened and a man appeared. His face was in the dark. I saw the outline of his body against the fire—also on his sleeves the three stars of his rank. He was the captain. I lifted my hand, saluting, and told my name. He stood still for a minute, then,

stepping towards me with open arms, drew me to him before I had time to realize what was happening.

As he said, "Why, Carletto!" I recognized him, Claudio Graziani! You Anglo-Saxons may laugh at us Latins for kissing each other on the cheeks like girls; still, it was a rude embrace that we, Graziani and I, exchanged that way, after twelve years. He pulled me within and up to the fire, stunned with surprise.

"The devil!" he said, "Where do you come from, and what are you coming here for?"

I looked at him. I could hardly recognize the slender boy of old, standing now before me, tall, rugged, handsome as a god. He had a deep scar above the left eye; on his chest he wore three blue ribbons with a silver star on each.

"Good Lord!" I said, "you have changed!" and, pointing to the ribbons, "how did you get these?"

Three silver medals on one chest are as rare in the Italian Army as three Victoria Crosses in the British. He smiled.

"Well," he said, "one is the price for this," and he pointed to his forehead; "one for this," and he uncovered his left wrist, where one could see the signs of a bayonet blade having gone through from side to side; "and one was given me on a general notion of my Colonel that I did pretty well during the retreat last year, disentangling all my men out of the Austrian clutches in Carnia."

He was direct and simple. Making me sit down, he took the case off my man's shoulders and sent him

out, telling him not to come back, that his own man, by and by, would come and fix me up for the night.

"We have regular beds here," he said, pointing to two cots in a corner of the hut. "That's mine and that belonged to a captain of the 8th Alpini who was killed last week. You can have it. Well, isn't it most extraordinary that we should meet here again after so many years?"

Sitting down, he picked from a low shelf a loaf of bread and a box of meat and handed them to me. "It's late," he said. "I can't offer you anything but this and a drink of wine, or some coffee if you prefer. To-morrow you will join our regular mess. We are only six officers and have the best cook of the whole Division. Here you are!" and he drew his poignard from his belt, handing it to me for cutting my bread. I took it and wiped it carefully with a cloth before using it.

He laughed. "You don't like the taste of Austrian blood with your bread, do you?"

The rough joke shocked me. I thought of the blond boy, amid clouds of pink blossoms, turning his head up at his mother's call. I couldn't quite connect the image with this sturdy fellow in front of me, covered with medals and scars, handing me the knife with which he had killed his enemies.

Again I said, "You have changed, Claudio! How old are you?"

"Twenty-three," he said.

"Well, you could not have been older than ten when I saw you last. You were a mere child. Do

you remember your place on the hill, when I visited you at Easter-time, and the peach orchard, and your mother watching you from the window of the house? How is your mother? Tell me. How does she like the idea of your being engaged in this Arditi business?"

He sat silent for a minute.

"Well," he said, "she doesn't like it at all. At the beginning she was very much upset, almost went insane when she heard that I was getting into the Arditi. Now she is calmer. After all, it was just as dangerous a job when I was with the Alpini. We had no Arditi then to make the attack for us. We had both trench life and the attack. Now, at least, when there is no action, it's as soft for us as a vacation. We are well sheltered here, protected from the guns. This section is about the quietest of the whole front. For the last two months we haven't been called to do a thing. Soon winter is going to set in—very little chance of action from now on."

I asked him, "Have you been here long?"

"About three months," he said. "I was on Mount Grappa up to the end of June—it was pretty tough there. There is where I got the two holes in my body. But now, good Lord, it's a cinch!"

I asked, "Why did you decide to go into the Arditi? Did you apply for it?" He said, "Yes."

I asked again, "Why?"

"Well," he said, "it was right after Caporetto. You know how we all felt those days. I couldn't have done otherwise." He said these words in a sort of a

resigned way—a veil of sadness fell over us at the memories evoked by that fatal name.

I asked him: "Tell me, where were you when the break of Caporetto came? I'd like to hear all about you—I haven't seen you for so long! I can't realize that you are a captain now, and that you have been so brave as to win those three medals on your chest. Tell me all."

"I was out in Carnia, at Pal Piccolo," he said, "with a company of Alpini—way out of touch with the rest of the world. We never got any news over there until about one week after the events had happened. The first snow had fallen. We were making preparations for the winter. All was quiet along the line. Life was dull. All of a sudden the terrific news came and spread. Line has broken down between Canale and Caporetto—the second army is in retreat. The Austrians are coming down Val di Resia and Val di Natisone. They are in Gemona, they are at Tolmezzo, we are shut in, caught in the trap. You know what happens in these moments. Everybody rushes to the telephone for instructions; the soldiers get restless. They know there is something wrong somewhere and want to know more. They get restless, you know—one of us had to kill two or three of his men with his pistol to keep the rest quiet.

"I was a lieutenant then—alone with the company. A few days before my Captain had gone out on a furlough—leaving me in command. I tried to reach headquarters by telephone. The line was busy, of course, or out of order. For half an hour I tried

to get somebody, somewhere. Finally, I got a voice on the wire. I don't know where from.

"I asked, 'What are we going to do? I have the men of the third company with me.'

" 'Get them together and try to take them over into Cadore. The way to Tolmezzo is blocked. Get to Belluno and ask for orders there.'

"Then the communication stopped.

"I don't know who gave me that order. It might have been a general. It might have been a sergeant —I don't know.

"By that time the retreat had begun. Men were streaming down from every path, from every trail. We officers asked one another for news, for instructions. Nobody seemed to know anything whatever.

"I got my company together, mustered in all the supplies of food and blankets I could find around, and came down to the valley. How we ever got into Belluno I don't know. It took us four days over the mountains, through paths and trails. When we arrived there we were exhausted. Still, we couldn't find anybody there who could tell us anything or who could take care of us. We were told that the command of our group must be somewhere, further down, along the Piave.

"Exhausted as we were, I wanted at all cost to reach my command. The terrific responsibility of having those men in charge in those moments gave me the strength for keeping on. They were beginning to be pretty well played out. Most of them were ten or fifteen years older than I. Still, I didn't give them

a chance to rest. For two days more I kept them going, trying to find the command of our group. Finally, we got it, in Cornuda—my Colonel was there.

"When I got into his presence and told him that I had all the men of the third company with me, not one lost, he looked me in the face and shook me by the hand. I collapsed—fell down on the pavement like a block!

"He picked me up with his own hands. The next day he proposed me for this medal here." He pointed to the first ribbon on his chest. I was getting terribly interested in his account, and had left my bread and the box of meat on the table.

"Go ahead," I said.

"Forty-eight hours I slept, somewhere in a barn. When I woke up, the terrible vision of what had happened struck me with such intensity that I thought I would go mad. For those six days the tension of the responsibility had kept my nerves in shape. Now I collapsed. For two hours, alone in that hay, I wept like a child.

"I wept for those mountains of Carnia, for those rocks of Pal Piccolo, where for two years we had lived a life of misery and hardship; where my best friends, my best soldiers, lay dead—some killed, some frozen, some buried by the snowdrifts. I felt that no landscape of Italy, no lake, no blossoming hill, no grove of oranges, would ever console me for the loss of those rocks which we had defended for two years and to which my heart was bound forever.

"When I went out, through the streets of Cornuda,

I met for the first time the men of the second army in retreat. I covered my eyes with my hands. I didn't want to see them. My God! My God!"

He stopped. I looked at him. Mechanically he had lifted his hands and was holding them over his face.

We sat still. The vision of those days rose between him and me, clear, precise, terrific. It struck us as it strikes every soldier of Italy, from time to time, as it ever will, while our lives last. I saw the foothills of the Alps between Brescia and Verona, and the land below, just opened by the plow. The golden fall, as soft as a spring, spread its enchantment over the landscape. We did our work of war there then by routine after two years, almost forgetful in those rear lines of any war being on at all.

Now and then the thunder of the guns came from Val Giudicaria, from the forts of Riva. But it was so soft in the distance! It died off in the great vastness of the plains. A feeling of peace and calm held me, as I watched my soldiers at their work on the side of the mountains breaking the ground, putting in poles, drawing cables from pole to pole. Nothing gave any suggestion of war there. It was a peaceful task by peaceful men. From my place, I could see the Virgilian plain below. Climbing a few hundred feet, up to the crest, I could see the Lake of Garda on the other side, lying like a mirror under a haze of blue. An oblivion of life, after two years of strife, overcame me—an immense desire of love, love for this Italy of mine, whom I had forsaken for ten years,

whom I had found again as motherly as ever, as beautiful as ever, no matter how sad the times!

Then the blow came—sudden, terrific! Front broken—Udine lost—Palmanova lost—second army gone. The third army in hurried retreat has crossed the Isonzo, has crossed the Tagliamento. The enemy is driving on to Venice. It was like being with one's beloved girl, all wrapped in his love for her, and of a sudden, seeing a hand from behind disfigure her face with a knife.

For ten minutes we sat without a word, Graziani and I, under the weight of the memories.

Then I said, "Why should the thought of those days trouble us? Haven't we made good since then? Haven't our soldiers proved to the world that our flag is at the front unsoiled as ever, that they are as good as they were, as good as when they took Gorizia, when they took the Bainsizza?"

"They have!" Graziani said. "They have! They are the best soldiers in the world! We know it, you and I, and everyone of us who has seen them at work, who has seen them crossing the Isonzo in 1915, or at Col de Lana, at Mount Crappa, at the Piave. Everywhere there they fought like lions, on the desert of the Carso, in the mountains where they stood sufferings beyond description, alone, forsaken by the rest of the world. But why, why should the Lord have inflicted on us the unjust punishment of seeing them one day, defeated, haggard, coming back without arms, without pride—beaten?"

Then, drawing his chair to me, "You see," he said,

"the thought that ever torments me is of those French soldiers, those English soldiers, who came to our assistance after the break, marching into Verona, into Vicenza, splendid in their equipment, with fine trains of artillery, and beautiful horses, coming like saviours, and of our men, dumb, without pride, watching them pass!"

"Well," I said, "I don't think you should feel that way. French soldiers, English soldiers know what war is. They had similar experiences themselves. I think it was most admirable of them to come as they did with fraternal spirit, like brothers to brothers. Claudio, you are ungrateful to them!"

"Well, it's true, but I feel a terrible wrath when I imagine what they must have thought at the bottom of their hearts."

"Whatever they thought then doesn't matter. It was unfortunate that they saw our retreating men in that shape, but didn't they see them again on Mount Grappa where Italy was saved? Haven't they seen our men for a year now, on the Piave? My boy, two weeks after the blow, on the Piave, who stopped the Austrians? It wasn't the French soldiers or the English, with their fine equipment and the beautiful horses. It was our boys, worn, ragged, with their bare fists. Claudio, do you realize the miracle that those men performed? They were coming back like sheep on the road, heartbroken, without arms; the front was gone, the war was lost. We stopped them and said, 'Turn around and fight!' And they turned around and fought—fought just as they were, without asking

why, against hope, against fate, with the blind faith with which they pray and work."

I stopped for a while. Claudio had lifted his head—an immense pride gleamed from his eyes. I continued:

"Claudio, these soldiers of Italy are the greatest of all. For years they were forgotten on those mountains. Who ever thought of our men in the remotest corner of the Carnic Alps? Everybody in the world was thinking of France, of the French front. They were left alone.

"Now and then people saw pictures of them, those fake movies made in Switzerland, where they were represented doing stunts, climbing ropes like monkeys, or shooting guns from peak to peak. People liked the show. They clapped their hands, thought that war must be great sport. They didn't know!

"But somebody knew the real state of affairs all right—some German general in Munich or at the Austrian headquarters in Laibach. Some of these generals, who years ago used to tour our mountains with their wives, admiring the landscape, while quietly taking notes and making sketches. They knew the weak point of our front. They also knew that our men were tired, worn by two years of misery, boys who would listen to a friendly appeal, even if it came from the enemy. 'Let us all be friends! Why fight? The slackers at home get rich; we die here like fools, for nothing. Let's quit! Not another winter in the trenches!' They knew that the same appeal was coming to them from our Socialists at home, from the

Pope, from the friends of the people. 'Why fight? Let's all be friends—not another winter in the trenches; all home for Christmas!'

"And the winter was approaching—the cruel winter of the trenches up there, where every night men die like flies, frozen to death; where you never know whether the food will get there before you starve; where, if you are not killed by a bullet, you are likely to be killed by the avalanches; and, in any case if you save your life, you may lose your mind from the sufferings.

"At that time the great arch of our eastern front was under a tension beyond any limit, Claudio. They knew it, the German generals, and, at the right time, in the right place, they hit the blow and the arch snapped.

"Oh, Claudio! Those soldiers were as good as any, those soldiers that failed. Let's not condemn them! They were the same men that took the Bainsizza, three months before. They were good soldiers but there is a limit to everything. This cable that I am using to make my lines is the best made in America, the finest steel rope in the world. Well, did you not see some of those lines now and then snap?

"Claudio, we do not condemn those soldiers, you and I, who are doing our duty here and who have done it for three years. Who will have the right to condemn them? The people who stayed at home, perhaps, making money hand over fist? Or the French who had the support of England and America

for their boys? Or the English who are safe beyond their channel? Or the Russians who have deserted? Or the Americans who haven't sent us a man till yesterday?

"We do not wish to be unjust to anybody, my boy. We owe gratitude and love to all our Allies for what they have done for us, but let us be just to our own men first. Let's not forget that practically all of our war has been carried on by them, and, if they got a blow once that knocked some of their teeth out, they have shown the world that they could still sink deep and hold on with what they had left. Glory to our boys!"

Claudio Graziani was listening to me without missing a word. He got up and shook me by the hand. "You are right," he said, his face beaming with pride. "I am a fool at times, to be worried over that thing. Glory to our boys!"

Then, "You see," he said, "I love those boys more than myself. For the last three years, they and I have been all one family. Quite a few are still with me of my old company of Alpini, of those that I took safe into Cornuda."

And he continued, telling me how his battalion had been reorganized after the retreat, and sent over to the Asiago Plateau, how he had asked to enter the Arditi with some of his men and be sent to the Grappa, how he had taken part in the great action of June on the Piave, when the Austrians crossed the river and then were thrown back, killed or drowned.

It was there that he got his promotion. In July

he had been sent here to the Tonal, where life was easier. "As a matter of fact," he said, "here it is like a vacation for me. Now and then a few shots, but most of the time it's loafing. A regular 'cinch!' The only thing we need here is a few ladies. We miss them badly."

I laughed. "You are right," I said. "They should send us some, instead of keeping them down in the cities for the slackers." And we entered into a little disquisition about the merits of the ladies, especially of those down there at home, those girls of Turin, who were our joy when we were students, so fine, so gentle, so graceful.

He also wanted to know about the American girls. "How are they?" he asked. "How do they compare with ours?"

I said: "They are great! I wish they would ship us some instead of that rotten salmon and frozen meat. They are strong and lovely, full of life, full of fun, good at all sorts of sports, and dance like angels. They know how to flirt, too!" Also I tried to give him an idea of the Midnight Follies on the Ziegfeld roof. I described them vividly, helping my words with my gestures. He kept on saying, "Oh my! Oh my!" like a soul in pain.

For a long time we indulged in the contemplation of far-away visions of joy, not without a little sadness in our hearts at the thought of our youth going to waste, thus, among those mountains. It was now well advanced into the night. The man had come and fixed my bed. We got up to cast a glance outside. The

moon was out. Under its silvery light, the whole valley shone in solitude divine. The ruins of Ponte di Legno, down by the stream, cast their tragic note in the night. Now and then came the sound of a gun, now and then the light of a skyrocket went up. In front of us the Adamello rose, sublime mass of rocks and ice, against the sky.

All during that latter part of September, Graziani and I spent most of our time there together.

The work I had to do was very simple and easy. In the morning I went up the mountain with my men, gave them instructions for the day, saw that they should get their food at the proper time, inspected their lodgings, and scribbled down a few reports for headquarters; my sergeant attended to the rest. It was war, all right, but it was very much like the job of the boss of a gang of laborers on a road somewhere in the mountains, thousands of miles from the front.

Graziani also had a lot of time to himself. After he had straightened out the little routine business of his company, and given instructions to his lieutenants, he came up and joined me for the rest of the day. We went back to our memories of Turin. He posted me about a lot of people I had not seen for a long time. We talked for hours.

Then he took me to see the positions. From some protected point of observation, he pointed out to me the lines, the artillery posts, the forts, all the network of ours and the enemy's defenses. He knew the place thoroughly. During those three months, he

had studied that part of the front inch by inch, with conscientious care, knowing that at any time he might be called with his men to attack this or that point.

He was a splendid soldier. Young as he was, he had a clear vision of the strategic value of each position, had a little plan of attack ready in his mind for any point he might be ordered to take. He was as shrewd as an old general—a very valuable asset in those mountains, where the ground is so irregular that the problems of strategy can be decided only by the men on the spot.

What I admired most in him was his full devotion to his work, the paternal care that he had for his men—he, a boy of twenty-three, attending to those two hundred soldiers, most of them much older than he, and a tough gang, too! A few of them were peasants or mountaineers from the Alps of Piedmont and Lombardy, but mostly they were toughs from the suburbs of Milan and Turin, regular gangsters, who had practised "knifing" on the peaceful bourgeois of their cities before they ever had a chance to do it on the Austrians. War had redeemed them all right, as war does. They were brave soldiers, but they had to be treated with steel gloves! And there is where Graziani was at his best—stern and hard when the time came, handling them as the trainer handles a pack of wolves in the cage. They loved him, with the rude love of soldiers, with the rude love of the wild animal that has learned to know the hand that whips him and feeds him. He loved them, too, and tried to make life less hard for them. He gave them leaves of ab-

sence as often as he could, without breaking the rules. When he took them to an attack, he shared with them all the perils, tried to spare as many lives as he could. Once or twice, during the time I was there, he was ordered into some action. He was sad for the men that were left behind, dead. For a day or two after he came back he was all upset, thinking of them.

The summer was drawing towards its end. In those altitudes, fall begins a couple of weeks earlier than on the plains. Great forests on the sides of the mountains were turning brown and red. The valley was assuming that fine shade of coloring that is a joy to the eye, but stings the heart with a bit of melancholy. Graziani and I often sat at sunset and watched the falling of the shadows, the dying of the day. A veil of purple haze rose softly, filling the valley as far as the eye could see. But on the tips above the sun still shone gloriously. The giant block of the Adamello was all ablaze. Along the line died the sounds of the strife, the sharp ta-ta-ta-ta-ta of the machine guns. The miserable war of men seemed to end then in the infinite calm of the evening. We heard again the noise of the cascades, the rustling of the winds in the leaves. Seldom in times of peace had we such a feeling of rest in our hearts.

One night, about the middle of October, Graziani and I were sitting in our hut next to the fire, after the evening meal, the weather having been pretty cold for a day or two.

It must have been nine o'clock. He was rather tired and ready to go to bed. As we were silent for a while, each one following his dreams, we heard the noise of a motor cycle coming up the road from the valley. It wasn't anything unusual at that time, there being a movement of men and machines on that road every night. The motor cycle stopped a few hundred yards below, and from the window next to me I saw a soldier with a lantern getting off and walking up towards our place. It was a man from headquarters bringing a message for Graziani. He stopped at the door and handed a paper to him. Then he stood on the step, silent, waiting to be dismissed.

Graziani broke the seal and drew near the lantern set on the edge of the table. For a minute he was still, bent toward the light. Then he lifted up his head. I saw an expression of great surprise in his face. He didn't say a word, but handed the sheet to me.

The soldier stood there, waiting. Graziani turned around to him and said, "You may go, close the door." Then, turning again to me, "Down there, they must have gone crazy!" he said.

I read the message:

"During the night, the men of the eleventh company Arditi must proceed to occupy the trench under Col di Croce, known as the T Bowel, and replace there the third company of the Second Battalion Alpini. At five twenty A.M. to-morrow, October fourteenth, they will attack Col di Croce from the west side. Dispositions have been taken for our artillery

to prepare and support the action. Once the position is taken, the Commander of the Company will hold it, waiting for further instructions."

I turned to Graziani. "What!" I said, "Col di Croce!"

We both knew the position well. It was just a little ridge connecting the rocky spur under which we were sheltered, and the main block of the Adamello. On the west side it was nothing but a wall of rock, as steep as the Palisades of the Hudson. Our trench, the T Bowel, was about one hundred and fifty yards this side from the base of the rock, somewhat protected by a little elevation of the ground. The Austrians were right on top of the rock. Between the T Bowel and the rock there was a depression, a sort of a ditch entirely exposed to the fire from above—not only to the fire, but to any rock or stone or hand missile that one could drop from above. The whole place up to the foot of the rock was nothing but a mass of barbed wire entanglements, partly set by us, partly, on the side of the rock, dropped by the enemy. It was absolutely impossible for any human being ever to get through there. Half a dozen men, from above, could have defended the place against an entire regiment.

"Well," I said, "there must be a mistake somewhere." Graziani had sat down and was reading the paper again.

After a while, he said, "Who is this new Colonel down at Headquarters? The head of the staff?"

A new colonel had just come to the Division, about one month before. None of us had seen him as yet up at our place. Maybe it was the officer who entered the billeting station at Edolo the day I was there for my instructions.

"I don't know," I said. "I might have seen him, but I paid no attention to him, if he is the man who was down there when I passed through."

For a while Graziani sat in silence, absorbed in his thoughts. Then he said, "Well! I can't take my men to be killed this way. They will never get more than twenty yards out of the trench. There are at least ten lines of barbed wire there, and, even if we should get to the rock, we have no chance of climbing up. It's absolutely perpendicular, and as they are above us they can smother every one of us before we start.

"The chief of staff who was at Division Headquarters before this Colonel has been up with me to see the place. He recognized that it would be entirely impossible to do anything from this side. We wouldn't have remained three years in that confounded position if there had been any way of getting up to the top. The position there is very important, I know, but it cannot be taken. It cannot be taken, there's no use thinking of it. And with just a company of men, too! I don't know, I really don't know what to do!"

For a while again he was silent, absorbed in deep thought. Then he got up and got hold of the telephone. "I want Division Headquarters," he said. "I

want to talk to the Colonel, Chief of the General Staff."

After a while he got headquarters. First he was connected with one officer, then with another; he never seemed to be able to reach the Colonel. Finally he had him on the wire. I was sitting on my bench, on the other side of the table, listening to him. He was very calm.

"Colonel," he said, "I have received the order referring to the attack at Col di Croce. I wish you would allow me to come down to Edolo right away, as I need to talk to you in connection with the same."

". . . . . ."

"Well, I can't very well explain on the 'phone; I should need to see you."

". . . . . ."

"I would have time to do it, Colonel. I can get a motor cycle half a mile down here at the motor park. I could be back again by one o'clock. The T Bowel is just out here about an hour's march from the place where we are."

". . . . . ."

"You don't want me to come. Well, what I want to say is very important. I wish you would let me."

". . . . . ."

"Colonel, I will try to explain it to you over the 'phone. That position cannot be taken with a company of two hundred men. I don't think it can be taken at all from the west side. I could show it to you on the map."

". . . . . ."

"Colonel, I know the place very well. It's a steep rock—perpendicular—no men can climb it from this side!"

". . . . . ."

"We must do it and not discuss. I know, Colonel, I should not discuss. Still, I wish you would suspend this thing. I could explain to you fully when I can see you."

His voice was very soft and calm, but I could see from the tension of his muscles and from the trembling of his hand that he was under a terrible strain.

Again he said, "Colonel, it can't be done!" This time his voice was firmer, almost imperative. "It can't be done. There are ten lines of barbed wire defenses just in front of our trench and I haven't got in my company more than half a dozen clippers to cut them."

For a moment he was still. Then I saw an extraordinary change in his expression. He lifted the receiver as though he were going to hit somebody on the head. I tried to understand by the confused sounds of the receiver the voice from the other side. I thought I heard, "Do it with their teeth."

"Ah, if they have no clippers, they should cut them with their teeth!"

His voice was terrible. The boy had no more control of himself. His face was red, the telephone in his closed fist was shaking violently. I jumped off my chair, trying to grab him, to stop him. I heard him saying, howling through the receiver, "Well, if that is the case, come and do it yourself!"

Then he threw the receiver violently against the wall. It hit the lamp. The light went out. I fell back on my chair, stricken with horror. What had happened? Good God! Good God!

How long did we stay there, in the dark? Graziani had sunk down on the bench on the other side of the table. I couldn't see him, but I could hear his heavy respiration. After a while, through the shadow, I could distinguish the outlines of his body. He was bent over the table, his head between his hands. We never spoke. The horror paralyzed my tongue. My mind was benumbed. I could not realize yet what had happened.

Images of all kinds passed before me. I could not fix my attention on anything. I thought of him, so fine, so handsome, with his three medals, with the scar on his forehead. I thought of him, a few minutes before, sitting calmly on his chair lighting his pipe. Also I had a vision of the boy out on the hills, among the pink blossoms of his orchard, when his mother called to him by name. I thought of his mother, waiting for him at home, waiting for him to come when the war should be over—he with his three medals.

An immense despair filled my heart. I felt as though the whole world had crumbled at my feet, as though a terrific cataclysm had taken place somewhere. A mad wish seized me to get up and strike my head against the rock, that I might never know what would happen next. I was half unconscious. For how long? Lord knows! Then I heard a noise at the door. Somebody knocking. Then the door

opened and a man appeared on the sill—a major of the carabineers, with a blue band across his chest, a lantern in his hand.

He called, "Captain Graziani!"

Graziani got up without a word, picked up his hat, and marched out as in a dream, never saying a word to me.

The Major had lifted his lantern above his head, looking at him as he passed. Two carabineers, armed, were waiting outside. An automobile was standing on the road. Graziani got between the two men and started down towards the machine.

The Major was still there by the door watching the scene, when I got up and touched him on the shoulder.

"Major!" I called. He turned around and looked at me.

For a minute I couldn't speak, then I asked, "Major, what is going to become of him?"

He didn't reply, looking at me for a while, with a stern eye. He was holding his lamp up, examining me. I could see a nervous quiver on his lips. Again I asked, "Major, what is going to become of him?"

He lowered his lamp this time, and slowly answered, "He is going to be shot!"

Then he walked down to the car, got in by the side of Graziani, and they disappeared into the night.

CARLO BEUF

. . . FROM THE TORN GROUND INTO THE STARRY SKY, HIS BODY ROSE. . . .

XXIV

CONCLUSION

I WILL end the tales of Carletto with this tragic episode. Both he and I feel that the image of his friend should stand at the close of this book for the everlasting inspiration of the reader.

Never shall I forget the night when I read to him for the first time this story which I had written, after hearing his tale. We sat in my library under the lamp, by the table where my manuscript lay. When I finished reading—my words were still ringing through the room—Claudio Graziani appeared. From the torn ground up into the starry sky his body rose in the glow of its own light, all white, but for the abominable wound in his chest! And Carletto wrung his hands in distress at the poignant vision evoked by the power of my art, and such was the emotion that overcame us both that we sat spellbound, breathless, and for that night we spoke no more.

A similar emotion overtook us when I read to him "Bianca Maria," when I read "Oretta," when I read "Reginella." Each time, the evoked vision manifested its presence to us with the intensity of a reality. Thus during the period in which this book was written Carletto's emotions and mine were so much the

same that I was able to represent them as if my own. I have not tried to make a consistent story out of Carletto's life, but have just recorded the events that show the nature of his soul and convey the spirit of the land he comes from.

Though I am delivering the book to the readers under my own name, I feel that my part in it has been of little importance—of no more importance indeed, than that of the servant who opened the door and let the woman of Lesbos into the house of Solon.

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